Notetaking Strategies: Before, During and After Class

Before Class:

1. Read or skim relevant assigned readings to acquaint yourself with upcoming main ideas and content specific vocabulary.
2. Review the previous lecture while waiting for the next one to begin.
3. Check the course syllabus to see where you’ve been and what is coming up.
4. Do what you can to improve your physical and mental alertness (fatigue, hunger, location in the classroom).
5. Come prepared with the appropriate paper, pens, pencils, notebooks, etc.
6. Go to class ready to listen and learn.

During Class:

1. Be there!
2. Listen for the main ideas and relate them to the main topic.
3. Actively make connections between the new information and your prior knowledge (the textbook, the last lecture, other courses, your background knowledge)
4. Maintain a high level of concentration. If you get distracted, re-focus as quickly as possible.
5. Pay attention to the speaker looking for verbal and visual clues to what is important.
6. Listen carefully to the introductions and conclusions of lectures. They often contain some of the most valuable information.
7. Ask questions if you don’t understand a concept.
8. Take notes in complete thoughts but abbreviate, reduce and simplify whenever possible.
9. Make your notes easy to read. Use dark-colored pen and write or print legibly.
10. Develop a system for marking key ideas and important vocabulary
11. Be sure to include any diagrams or other important visuals.
12. Listen for key phrases such as “The three main reasons…” or “On the other hand…” that help you follow the pattern of the lecture and the sequence of ideas.

After Class:

1. Edit and review your notes as soon as possible after the lecture (within 24 hours).
2. Identify and fill in any missing information
3. Highlight or underline key points or important vocabulary.
4. Reduce the notes to main points or key questions.
5. Recite each key fact or idea out loud without looking at the notes. Try to put these ideas in your own words.
6. Think about your notes and reflect on how they relate to previous information or to the text.
7. Review your notes on a regular basis (weekly). Make it cumulative.
8. Periodically look for the emergence of main themes over several lectures.
9. Write a summary of each of the main concepts.
10. Predict, write and answer possible test questions.