

Cornell Notes

APSU Writing Center Handout

Cornell Notes are a structured note-taking method that helps students organize information, review material efficiently, and retain what they learn. The system was developed in the 1950s by Professor Walter Pauk of Cornell University and is still widely used today.

The 5-Step Cornell Notes Process

Record

During the lecture, use the main note-taking column to record key points.

Write in short, concise phrases, ideally five words or fewer.

Focus on main ideas, keywords, definitions, and examples.

Questions

After class, write questions in the left-hand column about the information you recorded.

These questions should:

Clarify meaning

Show relationships between ideas

Strengthen memory

Help you study later for quizzes and exams

Recite

Cover the note-taking column and look only at your questions.

Try to answer them out loud, using your own words.

If you can't answer a question, reread your notes and try again.

Reflect

Think about the significance of what you learned. Ask yourself questions such as:

Why is this important?

What principle does this relate to?

How can I apply this information?

How does it connect to what I already know?

Reflection helps deepen understanding and encourages critical thinking.

Review

Spend at least 10 minutes each week reviewing all previous notes.

Regular review improves long-term memory and prepares you for exams without cramming.

Summary

At the bottom of each page, write a summary of the key points from your notes.

This reinforces what you learned and gives you a quick reference for studying.