

Taking Useful Notes

This lesson introduces students to principles of useful note taking and gives them an opportunity to practice taking notes using the Cornell note-taking method.

Essential Question

How can using effective strategies help me take charge of my learning, in class and out?

Guiding Questions

How can I take useful notes that will help me study and learn effectively?

Objectives

- Students will understand the importance of taking notes, in class and while reading.
- Students will learn and practice the Cornell method of note-taking.

Advance Preparation

- Project Do Now for students.
- Practice reading “It’s Not Too Soon” aloud while adding notes on the Cornell note-taking page (either the slide show or a whiteboard).

Materials/Resources

- Lesson slides
- Student materials

Student Materials

- Text: “It’s Not Too Soon”
- Text: “Becoming a Better Student”
- Cornell note-taking practice sheet (or blank sheet of notebook paper)

Vocabulary

- key word
- cues
- shorthand

Do Now

3 min.

(Slide 1) Students jot down

- 3 ways taking notes can help them succeed in school
- 2 situations where taking notes is required in life

then share their lists with partners.

Introduction (Framing/Overview)

8 min.

1. Slide 3: Student Dedication (30-60 seconds)
2. Ask students (slide 4) to suggest ways that note-taking can help in school. Listen for the following and add any that students miss. (Don't show slide 5 until after students have offered suggestions!)
 - Notes are required in some courses.
 - Taking notes helps you stay focused and attentive.
 - Writing information down (and reviewing it later) engages your hands and eyes, which strengthens memory.
 - Notes make it easy to organize and review information for assignments and tests

We need to take notes because we soon forget 80% of what we hear!
3. Then ask students to suggest life situations (outside of school) in which they may need to take notes, both now and as adults. These could include meetings of clubs, workplace staff, or neighborhood associations; trainings and workshops; and expert presentations on topics of interest to them.
4. Tell students that taking good notes is an essential skill to help them succeed in school, especially as they go on to high school and college, where they will be responsible for summarizing and learning increasingly complex subjects. The notes they take, whether from their reading or from class sessions, will provide content they can use to study using the tips they explored on Day 5.
5. Introduce (slide 6) the vocabulary terms **key word**, **cues**, and **shorthand**. Provide examples of each and invite students to offer their own examples.
6. Display the concept map (slide 7) for the lesson. Briefly review the activities indicated.

Activity 1: Introduction to Cornell Note Taking

15 min.

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|---|---|
| 1. Show slide 8, “How easy is it to study from a page of notes like this one?” Elicit student responses before clicking to the answer “Too Messy, Too Much Information.” Follow the same process with slide 9. | Whole Class Discussion |
| 2. Summarize by telling students that useful notes need to provide the “just right” amount of information neatly presented (slide 10: just as Goldilocks could not eat porridge that was too hot or too cold, people can’t study from notes that are too crowded or too sparse!) Tell students they will be learning about and practicing a note-taking method called “Cornell note-taking,” after the Cornell University professor who developed it back in 1941. High school and college students around the world have used this method to succeed for many years. | Direct Instruction |
| 3. Show slides 11-14, explaining and commenting on the four steps as you do so. Give students time to observe and ask questions at each step, or ask your own questions to check for understanding. (For example, for “Use personal shorthand,” you could ask students how the examples provided compare with the shortcuts people use when texting or tweeting.) | Direct Instruction/
Class Discussion |
| 4. Tell students (slide 15) that you are going to model the note-taking process using the short text “It’s Not Too Soon.” Display slide 16 and ask students what you need to do first to set up your notes page. (<i>Answer: add the title, name, and date!</i>) | Teacher Modeling |
| 5. Proceed to slide 17 and begin reading the text aloud, inserting the notes on the page as you go. (<i>You may encourage students to follow along as you read, or you may prefer to have them just listen and focus their attention on the note-taking process. Also, the slideshow is formatted so that you can insert the prepared notes by clicking through as you read. However, you may also demonstrate the process using a whiteboard if you prefer.</i>) | |
| 6. After the reading, ask students to comment on ways that you followed the note-taking tips (for example, how you identified main ideas and used personal shorthand). Ask them what your next step should be. (<i>Answer: add cues in the side margin.</i>) Invite students to suggest possible key words, phrases, or questions that you might add. Display slide 18 and add the cues. | Whole Class Discussion |

7. Ask students what you still need to do at this point. (*Answer: add a summary at the bottom.*) Ask students to suggest possible ways to summarize the text. Display slide 19 and click to add the summary.

Activity 2: Practice Round: "Becoming a Better Student"

15 min.

8. Tell students they will now practice Cornell note-taking using the student text "Becoming a Better Student" (slide 20). Have students begin by setting up their note-taking page with the title, their name, and the date. (*Note: A sample pre-formatted page for Cornell note-taking is provided. However, you may have students use ordinary notebook paper so they can practice setting up the top, bottom, and side margins if you prefer.*) Tell students that they are to read the text aloud softly with their partner, but as they read, they should pause when necessary to take notes on main ideas (each student taking notes on his/her own page).

Partner Reading

9. Circulate among students as they read, making sure they are taking notes (not too many or too few!) and answering individual questions where necessary.

Individual Practice

10. After students read the text, have them discuss with their partners the notes they took and identify possible cues and summaries to add (slide 21). Students add their individual cues and summaries.

Pair and Share

Closure

4 min.

11. Ask students (slide 22) how they think Cornell notes can help them create graphic organizers and other study aids for assignments and tests.
12. Exit ticket: students' individual Cornell notes pages serve as an exit ticket (slide 23). However, if you have them turn the pages in, make sure to return them so students can review the information (and use it if necessary for the homework assignment).

Extensions

If you have extra time or want to assign homework, ask students to create a graphic organizer using the notes and cues from their Cornell notes practice page.

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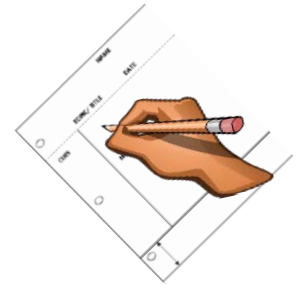
It's Not Too Soon

Congratulations--as eighth graders, you are the student leaders in your middle school. Next year you will go to high school, beginning the last leg of your journey through public education. Many eighth graders do not know that today is not too soon to begin thinking about what lies beyond high school. Will you go to college, vocational school, or the military? Will you seek employment? And will you be ready for these options?



Years ago, there were many good jobs available to young people with a high school diploma. Men and women were needed to build bridges, pave roads, and work in offices and factories using only the skills they had learned in high school. But that has changed. Today, many (if not most) well-paying jobs require some training after high school. Whether you decide to go to college, business school, or a training program, mastering certain skills before you go will help you.

One of these skills is note taking. What are the secrets to good note taking? Good note takers keep their notes neat and organized. If you can't read your notes the next day, they will not help you much! Second, to take good notes you must listen well and identify the main ideas—you won't be able to write down everything your teacher says, or copy all the details from the textbook. It's also helpful to use personal shorthand: abbreviations and symbols that allow you to write faster, like @ for "at" or → for "important!" Finally, good note takers go back to their notes and add cues or key words in the margin to help them study later. They may also summarize the main points at the bottom of the page.



Becoming a Better Student

Who is responsible for your grades?

That's right—you are!

Perhaps you've wanted to get better grades and just didn't know how. But science shows that every student can improve learning with good study habits, practice, and hard work. You can actually grow your brain!



Success in school depends more on hard work and good study strategies than natural ability. In the long run, your ability to focus, set goals, and not give up is more important than how easy or hard school has been for you in the past.

While some students are better in math or music, and others do well in history or art, every student can improve his or her performance. It takes perseverance—not giving up. Are you ready to take the next step?

Decide Where You're Going



Although at this stage in your life, it may feel like everybody else tells you what to do—teachers, parents, coaches, and so on—you will soon make more and more of your decisions. You will decide where you want to go in life, what you want to do, and what kind of person you want to become.

Think about your long-term and short-term goals. Where do you want to go in life? How will you get there? Take responsibility for your choices and decisions. Make a resolution to become a better student, and then take steps to make it happen!

Distractions—or Doing the Right Thing?

Many things can distract you from putting your resolutions into action. Sometimes they seem like good or important things. Do you want to hang out with a friend or study for an upcoming quiz? Watch a movie or work on a research paper that isn't due until next week?

Successful people have learned to resist the pull of instant satisfaction—the desire to get what they want, right now. They say “no” to this desire because they know what is important for long-term success, whether it is studying for a test, showing up at a job, or saving money for a car. Look honestly at yourself—do you really want to be a better student? You will have to say no to distractions. Say yes to doing the right thing, the important thing.



Total Health

Many of the steps you take to become a better student will also result in a happier you. This is especially true when we think about your health.



Good nutrition and physical conditioning result in better circulation of the blood to all parts of the body, including the brain. If you take care of your body, you'll feel more alive and have more energy. Your body and your mind need adequate rest, good food, and regular exercise. Participate in a sport or get regular exercise three to five times a week.

Pay attention to what you eat. Too much junk food like pizza, soda, cookies, chips, and other snack foods will rob your body of health and energy. You'll feel better and work better if you eat a healthy diet with lots of vegetables, fruit, and whole grains, like whole wheat bread or brown rice. Drink water rather than soda. Read nutrition labels—you might be surprised at how much salt or sugar is in that snack! It's okay to have a treat now and then, but choose to eat a healthy diet every day. Better eating habits will help you for the rest of your life.

Set Your Goals and Celebrate Success

In an earlier lesson, you learned how to set priorities and manage your time. Later, you will learn more about how to set specific goals. If we break big goals down into smaller steps, it is easier to track success. For example, if you need to write a report, first you'll need to decide on a topic that interests you. Then you'll write a thesis statement (the main idea your paper is trying to prove). You'll outline your paper, write a rough draft, then review and edit it. Each step is important in reaching your final goal—a finished paper. Don't forget to reward yourself when you reach a goal.

Seek Out Supportive People

We all need friends, mentors, and people who will encourage our efforts. Find a study buddy you can work with or ask for help when you miss class. Part of succeeding in school is knowing *how* and *what* to study, and being part of a study group may help you.

Don't give up in your quest to succeed. The years you spend in middle school and high school are important, challenging years. But many people, including parents, guardians, teachers, and other school staff, want to see you do well. Don't be afraid to ask for help, and take the steps that will help you reach your goals.



Blank Page for Cornell Note Taking

The image shows a blank page designed for Cornell note-taking. It features a vertical line on the left side, approximately one-fifth of the way from the left edge, and two horizontal lines: one near the top and one near the bottom. These lines create a narrow left margin and a large central area for notes. On the left margin, there are three small circles, one in each of the three horizontal sections created by the lines, serving as guides for where to write the notes.