

Title:

Write to Remember - Seven Keys to Better Note taking

Word Count:

826

Summary:

It's a line most of us don't cross - we either are note takers or we aren't. While this article may not make the die-hard non-note takers convert, it will give them some tools to try. And even the most avid note takers will get some new ideas to add to their approach.

Keywords:

professional development, personal development, notes, notetaking, learning, training, action planning

Article Body:

People seem to be as divided on note taking as on any hot-button political issue. One group will give you all the reasons why they don't take notes:

I'd rather focus on listening.

I don't know what to write.

Note taking never worked for me in school.

While the note taking enthusiasts will counter with:

Taking notes keeps me focused.

I can always refer to my notes - I don't have to rely on my memory.

Taking notes works for me.

While this article may not make the die-hard non-note takers convert, it will give them some tools to try. And even the most avid note takers will get some new ideas to add to their approach.

Most of us use note taking techniques we learned or developed while in school. At that time our goal was the acquisition of knowledge with the purpose of reciting it back on a test or examination. As adults our purpose for note taking is typically quite different. We are taking notes on:

A group meeting

A phone call

An interview or other face-to-face meeting
A workshop or seminar
A book, article, newsletter or podcast

In all of these cases, while we want to acquire knowledge or information, the end goal of our note taking isn't a test, but application of what we've learned. As with most anything in life, when we change the goal we may want to re-examine and change the techniques we use to get there.

Here are seven ways to make your note taking more useful and valuable to you:

Start with the end in mind. Start by understanding why you are taking the notes. Don't take them because you are "supposed to," take them because you know what or how you might use them. Having this picture in your mind will help you take the right notes without being lulled into writing down everything.

Lose the linearity. Most people take notes that are very linear in nature. Not all lectures, conversation or meetings follow a strict 1, 2, 3 or outline pattern. Allow yourself to take notes without a strict linear format. There will be times to write a list, but there will also be occasion for more free more comments and thoughts.

Capture ideas. While you are in the workshop or conversation new ideas will spring up. They may be connected to the situation, or they may not - either way you want to capture the idea while you have it! Give yourself permission to write down your ideas with your notes.

Capture actions. The thing you are discussing or learning about (and therefore taking notes on) may suggest specific action steps you need to take. If you are taking notes in a meeting or face-to-face conversation this might seem obvious. But again, as you are engaged in taking notes you may think of a new action step or task. Make sure you write these down and don't lose them.

Develop shortcuts. You will find that if you use abbreviations, or develop other shorthand that works for you, it will make your note taking easier and faster. Since you won't likely be sharing your notes with anyone, the nature of your shorthand can be very personal. This technique will help you speed up your note taking.

Have a format. Perhaps you will find that developing a common format will make your note taking easier, or even more enjoyable. I divide a note taking page in to two columns. In the right column I take my normal notes. In the left column I draw a light bulb at the top - under it I place the ideas I have during the

note taking situation. About half way down the left column I place a check mark inside of a small box. This is my icon for actions. I write the actions I think of or are generated while I am taking notes in this area of each page. I share my format as a example, you are welcome to use it or come up with your own!

Review and summarize. Perhaps the most valuable thing you can do comes after you are done. Take a few minutes to review your notes - adding any words or phrases that will make them clearer. The review process will help you remember and make the notes more useful. Once you have reviewed them, take a couple of minutes to note the most important points again. This summarization will serve as a great way to "lock in" the learning you gained from the situation.

Each of these seven things can help you improve the value of your notes. If you take notes regularly, try one or more of these approaches. And if you aren't a note taker, consider these ideas as a way to try a new approach to note taking - one that might provide you value without the barriers you have encountered in the past.