



Notes you can actually study from.

There is a difference between notes you take and notes you make. One is a transcript of the room; the other is a tool you can test yourself with weeks later. This document covers the Cornell layout, a lecture method, the shorthand that saves time, and how to read a chapter with a purpose rather than from the top.

1 Note-taking versus note-making

Note-taking records what was said. **Note-making** reworks it into your own structure and your own words. Only the second gives you something to study from, because only the second forces you to process the material rather than copy it. The published evidence points the same way: the benefit comes from the combination of the two activities, not from writing alone.

A useful test is what the page looks like a week later. A transcript of slides reads like someone else's lecture and invites nothing but rereading. Notes you made read like a set of answers you can cover up and reconstruct — which is the whole point.

"the combination of taking and reviewing notes contributes to school learning."

Kobayashi (2006), a meta-analysis of note-taking and note-reviewing studies

EVIDENCE Kobayashi, K. (2006). Combined effects of note-taking/-reviewing on learning and the enhancement through interventions. *Educational Psychology*, 26(3), 459–477. "doi:10.1080/01443410500342070"

2 Why transcribing slides fails

Copying a slide verbatim feels like work and produces nothing to retrieve from. You have recorded words you were already being shown, in an order you did not have to think about — so little storage strength is built and there is not much to test yourself against later.

■ **The words are already on the slide.** Copying them adds nothing you did not have.

■ **No processing.** Deciding what matters and rewording it is where the learning is.

■ **Make notes instead.** Reduce, restructure, and write the cue questions you will test yourself with.

3 Building notes so they can be used for retrieval

Notes earn their keep when they can be used to bring answers back from memory. That means leaving a way to ask yourself questions, and keeping the material in a form you can check your recall against.

WRITE CUES, NOT JUST FACTS

A question in the margin turns a page of notes into a self-test. Cover the notes, answer the cue, then check. This is the step that turns a transcript into a study tool.

RETRIEVE BEFORE YOU REREAD

Testing is a means of improving learning, not just of assessing it (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006) — and it beats elaborative studying such as concept mapping (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011).

EVIDENCE Roediger & Karpicke (2006), *Psychological Science*, 17(3), 249–255; Karpicke & Blunt (2011), *Science*, 331(6018), 772–775.

4 The Cornell layout, drawn out

Three zones on one page. The cue column is filled after the lecture; the summary strip is written last, in your own words, from memory.

CUE COLUMN

Key words, dates, formulas and the questions you want to ask yourself. Written or completed *after* the lecture, so it tests the notes rather than repeats them.

NOTES COLUMN

The main body: reduced points, diagrams, worked steps and definitions — in your own words and shorthand, not full sentences copied from the screen.

SUMMARY STRIP

Two or three lines at the foot of the page, written from memory at the end: what this page is actually about. This is the layer you revise from.

NOTE The proportions are a convention, not a rule. What matters is that there is always a column of questions and a closing summary — the two parts that make the notes retrievable.

**5 The lecture method: three zones, then ten minutes**

During the lecture, work only in the notes column: reduce, use shorthand, and leave the cue column and the summary strip empty. Both are filled afterwards, which is precisely what forces the review that Kobayashi's meta-analysis points to. Speed comes from a small, fixed set of symbols you never have to think about.

Mark	Meaning	Mark	Meaning
→	leads to / therefore	w/	with
∴	therefore	w/o	without
≈	approximately equal	Δ	change in
≠	not equal to	def.	definition
↑ / ↓	increase / decrease	e.g.	for example
> / <	greater / less than	cf.	compare with
Q:	question to answer later	*	examiner favourite — learn it
!	check this / unsure	ref.	source to cite later
⇒	it follows that	viz.	namely
+ve / -ve	positive / negative	incl.	including

The set should stay small enough to use without thinking. If a symbol has to be looked up, it is slowing you down rather than saving time.

THE TEN-MINUTE CONSOLIDATION, STRAIGHT AFTER THE LECTURE**1 Fill the cue column**

Turn the main headings into questions and the key terms into prompts. Do not copy notes sideways.

2 Repair the gaps

Mark anything you cannot read or follow, and check it against the reading now, while you remember the room.

3 Write the summary strip

Two or three lines, from memory, with the notes covered. This is the layer most students never write.

4 Test yourself once

Answer the cues aloud, then check. One cold pass now beats rereading the notes the night before.

6 Worked example — one page of notes on price elasticity of demand

The cues below are questions the notes can answer; the notes column shows how little text is actually needed once the material is reduced. Read the cues, cover the notes, and answer aloud.

Cue column (questions)	Notes column (shorthand)
What is PED?	$PED = \% \Delta \text{ quantity demanded} \div \% \Delta \text{ price}$. Responsiveness of demand to a price change.
What sign?	Negative for normal goods ($P \uparrow \rightarrow Q_d \downarrow$). Judge by <i>magnitude</i> ; ignore the minus sign.
Categories?	Elastic: $ PED > 1$ · Inelastic: $ PED < 1$ · Unit elastic: $= 1$.
What decides it?	Substitutes available · necessity vs luxury · share of income · time horizon.
Where does it bite?	Revenue: elastic $\rightarrow$ price cut raises total revenue; inelastic $\rightarrow$ price rise raises revenue.
Which formula?	Arc (midpoint) for a range; point elasticity for a small change. Read which the question wants.
Common trap?	Quoting the sign as the answer, or dividing by the wrong base percentage.

SUMMARY STRIP — WRITTEN FROM MEMORY, THREE LINES

1. PED measures how strongly quantity demanded responds to a price change.
2. Its sign is negative; only the size decides elastic or inelastic.
3. That size links directly to total revenue and to pricing decisions.



7 Read with a purpose, not from the top

Reading a chapter line by line, from the first word, is the slowest way to find out whether it is even useful. Decide what you want from the text first, then choose the method that gets it. Most of a reading list can be handled with a skim; only the sources you will actually argue with need a close read.

Purpose	Method	What you produce
Is this source relevant at all?	Skim: title, abstract, headings, first and last paragraph of each section.	A yes or no, plus the two sections that matter.
I need one specific fact or figure	Scan: hunt for the term or number and ignore the rest.	The fact, with its page, written into your notes.
I must understand and use the argument	Close read: slow, with notes, following each step of the reasoning.	A summary in your own words and a set of cue questions.
Two sources seem to disagree	Comparative read: read both against the same question.	A short table of where they agree and where they differ.

8 A short, fixed set of annotation marks

Mark	Meaning	Mark	Meaning
vertical line	important — return to this	?	unclear; ask or check
*	key claim or definition	cf.	compare with another source
[]	possible quotation to cite	→	causes or leads to
circle a term	new vocabulary to define	ref.	must be referenced if used

NOTE Keep the set small and identical every time. Marks you have to decode later are worse than no marks at all.

9 Worked example — a long chapter reduced to ten lines

The point is not the ten sentences but the compression: a twenty-page chapter becomes something you can review in a minute and test yourself against.

1. Memory is not a recording; it stores meaning and reconstructs it on demand.
2. What you can retrieve later depends on how effortfully you processed it now.
3. Rereading feels fluent and produces weak, short-lived retention.
4. Bringing an answer back from memory strengthens it — the testing effect.
5. Spacing study across days beats massing it into one long session.
6. Mixing topics forces you to select a method, which is the transferable skill.
7. Sleep after study consolidates memory; short sleep erodes it.
8. Difficulty during study is not failure, and ease is not success.
9. Notes help when they are reviewed; taken alone they are only a transcript.
10. Test yourself cold, from memory, before deciding that you "know" it.

10 A reading log, and how it feeds the weekly grid

When	What	Purpose	Kept	Where it goes
Mon 2 Mar	Module text, Ch. 4	Close read (essay)	6 points, 2 quotes with pages	Essay plan
Wed 4 Mar	Journal article, methods	Scan for method	Sampling approach, 3 limitations	Literature notes
Fri 6 Mar	Two chapters on trade	Comparative read	Where the two disagree	Tutorial answer
Sun 8 Mar	Lecture handout	Skim and cue	Definitions for the quiz	Cue cards

LINK TO DOCUMENT 01 Each row of this log becomes the "next action" in a study block on the weekly grid, so a reading session is never simply "read Chapter 5" but "skim Ch. 5 and log the two sections that matter". The log is how the plan and the reading stay connected.