Effective Note-taking

Note-taking during a lecture is one of the most cognitively demanding learning activities. A lecturer speaks at a rate of 125-140 words per minute. You should not try to reproduce every word, rather you should focus on understanding what’s being said, then write in your own words.

• Generating questions is the core of all learning.
  o Mirror questions (after lecture, create them in left margin)
  o Summary question of entire lecture connects mirror questions
  o “50-Point” question (imagine one that might appear on test)
• Use verbal translations for quantitative notes next to problems; describe steps.
• Remember Ebbinghaus “forgetting curve”; you lose 70-80% if you don’t read and refine notes within 24 hours. A short review of notes can save you re-learning before the test. ENGAGE with notes, instead of simply reading. Generate questions, use colors, make mind maps.
• Be open to different styles: Cornell, T-notes for quantitative classes, concept maps, etc.

Best practices:

• Use loose-leaf notebook rather than spiral so you can add/rearrange
• Date and label each lecture
• Write on right side only
• Make eye contact, watch and listen for cues
• Use left side for asking “mirror questions” answered by notes
• Leave lots of white space, skip lines
• Use abbreviations consistently
• Do not write in complete sentences
• Put ideas in your own words
• Review and edit/reduce notes within 24 hours