

The Cornell System

Effective and efficient note taking

When you're taking notes at a meeting, conference or training class, how much information can you hope to recall? Do your notes help you easily recall the key points and actions? Or do they help very little even just a few hours after the event?



Over the years, there have been many "tried and tested" systems of note taking proposed for students and business people alike. The Cornell Note Taking System is a very simple yet effective system.

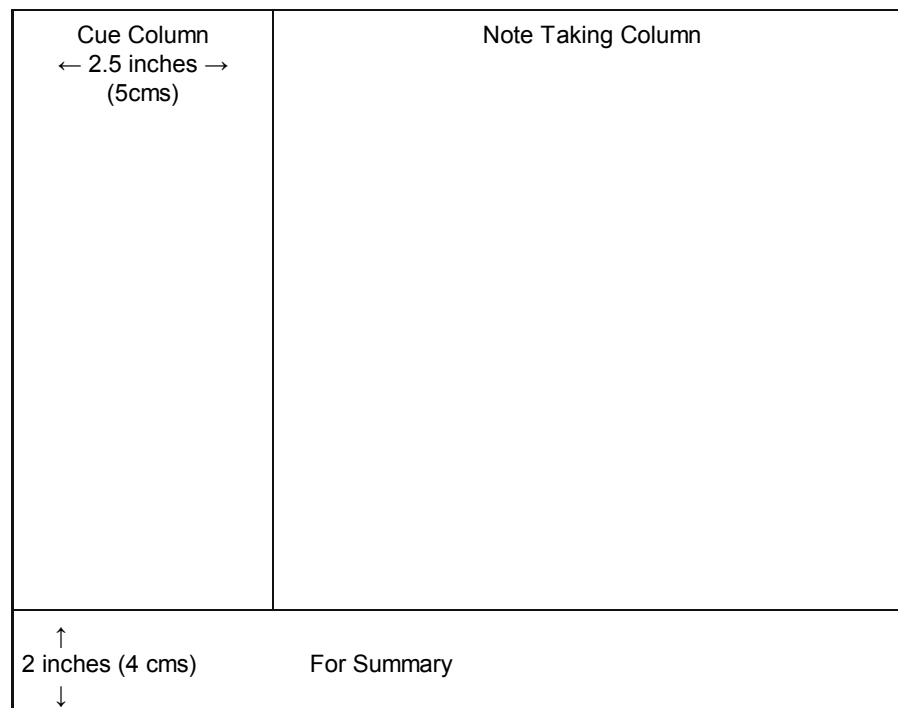
Originally developed for students by Walter Pauk at Cornell University, it is effective whenever you need to take notes and recall information.

The Cornell System is a great way of organizing your notes so that you can later identify the key points and actions, and recall information easily. With this system, you organize the notes as you take them; there is no need to go extra effort of rewriting your notes. So the system is both effective and efficient.

The Cornell Format

The Cornell format is very simple. Here's how to create a note taking page:

1. Use a full sized piece of paper for your notes. You need plenty of space so your notes don't get fragmented and disorderly.
2. Divide the page into two portions by drawing a line 2.5 inches (5 cm) from the left margin of the page. This is the cue column. On the right of the cue column is the note-taking column. This is where you put down your notes.
3. Two inches (4 cm) above the bottom of the page, now draw a line across the page. This is where you summarize your notes on the page.



Using the Cornell System

Using the Cornell note taking system involves three main stages.

Observing – Listen and decide what you will write down, based on what you hear, read and discuss.

Recording – Write down you notes during and after the event.

Reviewing – To help you learn the information and recall it in future, keep reviewing what you have written.

Observation and Recording Your Notes:

1. Create a note-taking page in the Cornell format.
2. Write down your notes in the note-taking column. Make them as detailed as necessary, along with diagrams and examples.
3. Immediately after the event, use the cue column to write down keywords or key phrases or actions. These are words or phrases that sum up the detailed notes in the note-taking column. You can turn your keywords/key phrases into questions too.
4. Now revisit the notes again to write a summary in the bottom summary section of your notes page.

By revisiting the notes immediately to write the key words and summaries, you will be able to write and review while the whole event is still fresh in your mind.

Reviewing Information:

Using the tool helps you recall and recapture what you heard. The system also allows you to self-test if you need to memorize what you've learned.

1. Take a blank sheet to cover the notes in the note-taking column.
2. Form questions of your keywords and key phrases.
3. Answer the questions from the information you had written down.
4. Check your answers against the notes in the note-taking column.
5. Continue repeating the process until you can recall all that you require to retain.
6. To ensure you have long term recall of the information, repeat the process again several days and then weeks afterwards.