

## Quick Guide: How to Take Better Notes

You may have to take notes at formal or team meetings but there are also other situations when you may have to take notes. For example, on a conference call or when taking instructions from your boss or a client. It is useful to know quick ways to get these notes down in a structured way. Here are the **top ten tips** to help you:

- 1.** If it is a meeting situation, **get to the meeting early**. Claim your seat next to the chair so you can see as well as hear who is talking. If it is a conference call, be on the phone before everybody else. Use a headset so both your hands are free for taking notes and organising papers.
- 2.** As people arrive put a name to each face and **draw a small table plan** showing where everybody is sitting. This will be useful to refer to when your head is down writing notes. On a conference call, try to make a note of distinguishing points about their voices when people first introduce themselves.
- 3.** **Listen and concentrate carefully throughout**. Always ask if you don't understand, or if you are unsure about what they have decided.
- 4.** **Use a 3 column format for taking notes**. Rule a 2.5 cm margin on left and right of page, use the first column for the initials of the person speaking, make notes of discussions in the large middle column and use the third column for actions and any notes to yourself. Use every other line, so you can go back and insert a word or phrase if needed or rewrite more neatly any points written quickly. Remember to pre-rule several pages.
- 5.** **Pick out key phrases** by listening for the following: agreed, decided, approval/ed, proposal/e, increase, decrease, trends, any dates/figures, urgent, deadline, immediate, important, in conclusion/summary, noted etc.
- 6.** **Take notes in bullet points** and move down the page to encourage you to write less. Start each point on a new line. You should end up with most of your notes towards the left hand side of the middle column.
- 7.** **Develop short forms** for regularly used words. Use abbreviations and acronyms. Write only the beginning of long words, eg, 'beg' for 'beginning', 'con' for 'confirm' or 'conclusion'. Leave out vowels in words, eg, 'mtgs' for 'meetings'. Use symbols instead of whole words.
- 8.** Always **keep up with the meeting**. If you miss a point made, leave a line and keep going. The chances are the point missed will be repeated. If not, ask at a convenient point or after the meeting. By keeping up though, you have missed only one point, but if you try to write the point you missed you may miss the next two or three as well.
- 9.** If you are taking instructions by phone, **read back your notes** to check you have everything correct. It is better to clarify at the time.
- 10.** **After the meeting or call read through your notes**, reflect on what was said during the meeting or conversation and then tidy up your notes so that they make sense for typing up. Aim to type up your notes within 24 – 48 hours.

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