





GETTING STARTED TOOLBOX #4

YOUR RESOURCE FOR BIG AND SMALL IDEAS

Note-Taking Systems

This is the fourth of your first four toolboxes designed to help you begin your learning improvement efforts as "self-scientists." Note-taking is a great place to begin because when you create an effective note system this will lead to better learning, retention, and recall of information. A better note system will yield visible and immediate improvement to learning.

This toolbox will give you useful background information to prepare you to begin coaching conversations with your child about using a better planning system.

Steps to Follow

- 1. First, watch the lesson four video, and complete your workbook including reading the four Idea Generators.
- 2. Read this toolbox all the way through for additional information and to gather ideas for coaching your kids on better note systems.
- 3. Select an exercise you want to use from the exercises in the back of this toolbox. Then get started!











Maybe

No

Introduction

This is your toolbox full of ideas to help you start coaching better note-taking. Just like the trusty toolbox you might have in your closet or garage; it serves you as a resource. Except there are two things that are different:

- 1. This toolbox is full of great teachable ideas in the form of exercises and mini-lessons you can use
- 2. It won't be used to "fix" anything; you will use it to find new learning opportunities for your child.

As a coach, you need lots of different tools to help your kid study smarter. And, of course, you need to know how to use each properly. Read through this document and get familiar with your new tools. Then start your coaching conversations to improve note-taking skills.

Read this for understanding and use it in conjunction with your Lesson Four video, and your Lesson Four Parent Workbook.

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Version 4

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GETTING STARTED TOOLBOX

YOUR NOTE-TAKING SYSTEM



You have identified Learning Strategies Dimension Four as one of the starting points for study improvement. This toolbox will give you useful background information to prepare for coaching conversations with your child about setting up a better note-taking system to promote better learning and memory. It also includes exercises and mini-cases to build better skills.

Your 7 Challenges

These are the challenges you will need to overcome when you attempt to improve learning maturity by helping your child to design a better note-taking system.

- ✓ Most students misunderstand the purpose of note-taking they view it too narrowly as merely a tool for capturing and recording ideas and information. They do not use note-taking as part of a systematic strategy necessary to improve memory and recall. Notes must be integrated with other powerful learning strategies such as spaced learning and retrieval practice.
- ✓ **The purpose of notes is defined too narrowly.** Students don't understand that notes should be part of a <u>system</u> for remembering what they learned. The purpose of effective note-taking should not be confused with creating reference material to be used later. Reference is helpful, but the primary value to the student is understanding and enabling the retention of information over a longer period of time.
- ✓ Most students do not perceive notes as being part of a system. Studies have found note-taking is most effective when notes are organized and then transformed by a series of student interactions as part of a larger process. An effective note-taking strategy requires not only effort, but a change in habits about the use of those notes. The notes are only the beginning.
- ✓ You may be challenged by a lack of motivation to change until you can help your child understand the reasons and many benefits of interacting regularly with their notes after initially recording them. You may need some "self-scientist" experiments to prove to your kids that there is lots of learning power with a better note system. (see exercises at the back of the toolbox)
- ✓ **Anticipate student resistance to this change effort** to improve their note systems. Remember the *Dunning-Kruger effect* where people who don't know how to do something overrate their capabilities? You may likely face this. Faulty or mediocre note-taking is often self-justified by the belief we have excellent memories and therefore they don't need to take better notes because "I can easily recall information." But a large body of research tells us this is not the case.
- ✓ **Mediocre notes look OK when viewed through short-term effects**. Long-term memory gets confused with that of the short-term. Students confuse recall one day after the lesson thinking they will remember it weeks later. But memory decays rapidly.
- The problem you are solving with better notes has to do with forgetting. German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus discovered the "forgetting curve" in 1895 while conducted some of the first experiments on memory and recall. His insights will help you explain why notes need to be used as part of a much larger method.



The 7 Elements of Better Note Systems

What are the things you need to do to help your child acquire an expert note-taking system? Here are some of the things you will want to work on.

- 1. You need to reframe and expand your purposes for taking notes. You will need to convince your child their notes should become part of a systematic effort of enhanced learning and better memory. This is more expansive thinking that may take a while. Emphasize the benefits to the child including "better strategies = learn more, and study less." This is the challenge of learning to exert a little more effort in the short term to gain a long-term advantage.
- 2. You start with a better method for recording notes that encourages thinking about capturing key ideas and summarization. Select a method and structure it to encourage good habits. We think a "blank sheet" of paper approach is a distraction that does not encourage good habits. One great strategy to learn is the **Cornell Method**. Read about it here (pages 8 and 9) and understand how it works, then begin practicing it using exercise one. Then expand your child's capabilities by adding other strategies so that you build an effective system.
- 3. When notes are created, your strategies must consider how you will use them for near future retrieval practice and self-quizzing. For example, help you child practice using **two column notes** which provides the opportunity for self-quizzing by covering one column or the other with your hand. Long outline notes do not make this easy. Experiment with different methods.
- 4. It is helpful to learn note taking strategies where new information is connected to existing information. You do this because it greatly helps memory and recall. Learn how to draw mind maps, charts, and flow diagrams. You can teach this by modeling how to do this during your instruction on a whiteboard. Or watch some videos on this.
- 5. To gain ownership, your child should have a note system that is tailored for him. This includes incorporating good habits and other learning strategies like *spaced practice*, *recitation*, and *retrieval practice*. Get familiar with these learning strategies and have conversations on how to fit them into your child's system. This is a good place for your "self-scientist" hats where you experiment with different approaches until you find the one that works best. See exercise two.
- 6. You will need a good organizing system. Of course, this starts with simple things like file drawers and binders. At a more sophisticated level, you need to consider how paper and digital notes connect with any software used, all of this organized for quick access. We like Microsoft OneNote as a useful way to organize large amounts of information one learning expert calls this part of his "second brain." Promote that thinking.
- 7. Talk about WHEN note-taking should occur. This get overlooked. It is not only when we read or sit in class. Many situations lend to taking notes. For example, skimming a chapter before reading provides an opportunity to outline key ideas and ask questions you need to answer when you read it for detail. With **discovery learning**, like field trips, what type of notes should be taken? Or when your child is conducting research? After a set of new math problems, how does your child summarize to remember how to do them next time?

Key Point

Of course, your child should have a system that fits his or her age, sophistication, and learning maturity. And, please remember, you want to "start small" with only a few new things to practice at first. But keep in mind your longer-term purpose here. College-level work requires managing and reviewing large amounts of new information. But you need to start somewhere. It will take you time to get there. Remember the right change method – *start small* – *gain some successes* – *build confidence* – *add a few more strategies*. Then repeat.



The Best

Checklist to Audit Your Note-Taking System

Discover how well your notes are serving your learning. Have you set them up to help you learn better? How can you improve them so you can learn more effectively?

Wikipedia: "An audit is an evaluation or examination of something by a person or group of people."

My Note Audit

next time?

Review what you do and evaluate your note system by answering these questions:

☐ I believe the primary purpose of taking notes is to improve my memory. ☐ Do I take notes during class sessions and video lessons? ☐ When I take notes, do I separate the details and bullet points from the key ideas and my summary of the information? □ When I read, or watch a lesson, do I write down the ideas in my own words? (versus transcribing the information using the same words) □ Do I know the Cornell method and am I using it often? ☐ When I take notes, I try to set them up in two columns so I can self-test. □ Do I draw mind-maps and diagrams in my notes to show the relationship of ideas? ☐ Are my notes organized on my work area by subject or project? (versus being scattered everywhere) ☐ My notes are organized into labeled files, binders, or in a systematic way so that they can be easily located and reviewed. ☐ I can always quickly find my notes when I need them in *less than 5 seconds*. ☐ Are my notes always filed by subject or topic? □ Do I have a dedicated file drawer, or area, where I keep my note files? ☐ Are some of my notes organized into an app like Microsoft OneNote, Evernote, Google Keep, etc. so I can review them quickly? ☐ I take notes when I skim a chapter before I read it. ☐ Do I take notes while I am reading a chapter or passage? ☐ I always take notes to summarize the major points of a chapter after I read it. □ Do I take notes when we are on field trips to capture my insights and new ideas? ☐ I have a system or method for regularly reviewing my old notes to help me remember information. ☐ After I solve problems or do experiments, do I note how I did it so I can remember for the

For your discussion, use the student version of this audit in the Student Note-Taking Audit and Guide found in lesson 6 materials. Use the questions to identify at least three ways you can improve your note system. Then just do it. Then do it again in 4 weeks.

organize way to promote my learning and remembering.

☐ When I think about it, the different types of notes I take fit together into a systematic and



21 Rules for Better Note Systems

Use this advisory to create a top-notch note-taking system to enhance your learning.

- 1. The only reason you create any system in the first place is to <u>make your life simple</u>, not more complicated. Don't struggle to set up the 'perfect system' that will be super complicated to use, maintain, and to set up.
- 2. This is a <u>system</u> you are creating. Systems exist for many reasons. Your note system should save you:
 - Time
 - Effort
- 3. Do not think of this as a "filing system," it should serve as your **memory system**. You want to store things to study, remember, and recall information. Of course, you want to use it to review. But don't create your own private Wikipedia that becomes a crutch for not learning things because you can find them so easily.
- 4. In specific words: the entire structure around your system must help you be <u>more efficient at learning</u>. If it doesn't do this, don't waste your time just to tidy your desk up a bit.
- 5. Set your system up so it enables learning through *recitation*, *self-testing*, and *spaced practice*. Mimic the *Cornell note* method in your documents using two-column notes for information with the left column containing summaries and key points. Or create fill-in exercises with answer keys on the next page.
- 6. Your system should not encourage rereading information we know this is an inefficient learning strategy. Set it up so you can find key points, ideas, and note how information connects together. Don't make it a dumping ground for transcribed information, you will only be automating inefficient practice. Include things that will help you study tomorrow, next week, and months from now.
- 7. **Organize information by concepts**. <u>Folders are not how the brain works</u>. The brain works by thinking of something and then finding it. You should be able to go to your folders, search and find anything immediately. How you organize things should not depend on the folder labels, but rather the names of the things or how you will use them.
- 8. The first rule of being productive? **Your system must mimic how your brain searches** rather than setting up a new task that you must learn. You want to remove the friction from using it in the future. This is a whopping big reason why the parent should not set up the system *for* your kids. Help them make a system they own by doing it *with* them.
- 9. You shouldn't have to spend time having to think about your system if you do you will not use it. It should feel natural.
- 10. Set up your system so it will serve your future studies. A Don't organize it to fit only today's information, poor design will age rapidly.
- 11. **Follow the 5-Second Rule.** You must be able to find anything you are looking for under 5 seconds. It doesn't matter if it's a digital or physical system You must be able to find exactly what you are looking for and fast.



- 12. **Follow the rule of 'two actions'**: if it takes more than two actions to find or complete something, you are doing it wrong. And for digital information? Same rule, different name: call it 'two clicks'. If you are looking for a specific fact or concept and you have to go through folder after fold to find it, then it's a broken system.
- 13. Create a "**second brain**" with OneNote, Evernote, or Google Keep or similar. You do this to enable the **5 second rule**.
- 14. As part of your system, create "how-to" sections where you record **how** you successfully have done something so you can quickly repeat it. For example, once you discover a method to solve a math problem, record the steps and the reasons why. Practice recording more than *what* include *why* and *how*.
- 15. Consider buying a **mind mapping software** so you can digitally save the connections with the relationships you have made in your brain. Make it easy to review and helps your recitation practice the key to remembering things.
- 16. Digital is great because it can be accessed from anywhere. You can study in short bursts whenever you have a little time. Get this benefit by setting up and using ANKI to study.
- 17. If you use mnemonics to remember and retrieve, which every student should do, capture these in your notes.
- 18. The only reason you are creating a note system in the first place is to make your life simple, not more complicated. Don't try to come up with the 'perfect system' that is at the same time super complicated to use and to set up.
- 19. Setting it up the same way your brain works will make it **easy to start**, **adapt**, **and continue to use it in the long run**.
- 20. Whatever you do, do not suggest setting up your kids' note system like you organize your office work. Remember, this is a system for studying, not one for retrieving old invoices.
- 21. Sometimes the simpler the system, the more efficient it will be. **Less is more.** Don't make it more complicated than it needs to be.

Credit for many of these ideas to Dan Silvestre, personal development guru



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Teach this as a mini-lesson!

The 5R Note System

This is a good systematic way to work with your notes. Share it. We like this five-step approach because it is an easy to understand and solid note-taking method. Although it is one of many, it is widely used, and a good one to practice using.

The 5 Rs of Notetaking

Record: During the lecture, write all meaningful information legibly.

Reduce: After the lecture, write a summary of the ideas and facts using key words as cue words.

Recite: Recite all the information in your own words without looking at our notes or the text.

Reflect: Think about your own opinions and ideas. Raise questions and record original ideas

Review: Before reading new material, take 10 minutes to review

your older notes. Skim over the main ideas and details.

- Pauk, W. (1989). How to Study in College (4th Ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflir

1. **Record**: During class, or while reading, write down all important meaningful information. Do it legibly and leave spaces for adding summaries and insights later. See Cornell method below.

- 2. **Reduce**: Pause as you work and/or immediately after viewing; stop to write a summary of the ideas and major points using keywords as "cue words." Summarizing helps to:
 - Clarify the meanings and relationships of ideas
 - Connect ideas with existing networks of information
 - Strengthen memory retention
- 3. **Recite**: Frequent recitation <u>without looking at the notes</u> or the text is an excellent study strategy. It greatly improves the memorization of information and quickly reveals knowledge gaps and misunderstood information. (See Feynman Technique)
- 4. **Reflect**: Encourage your child to think about her insights and ideas as she reads over her notes. Teach your child to write down questions, then practice answering them creatively. Ask your child to review his notebook and then share this in your weekly SPR study planning and review meetings. Ask creative questions in your home classroom discussions and encourage your child to write papers or do a presentation at the end of a chapter.
- 5. **Review**: Before reading or studying new material, encourage your child to take time to quickly review older notes. Have her present the main ideas with details. Review enhances the retention of old material while adding new material to memory.

- Pauk, W. (1989). How to Study in College (4th Ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton

When you coach and encourage the use of these five steps, you are teaching a process that you want your child to do on their own, so they must see the benefits and value of these activities. To become college-ready, methods like this should become <u>fully-engrained habits</u> your child willingly does without needing your encouragement.

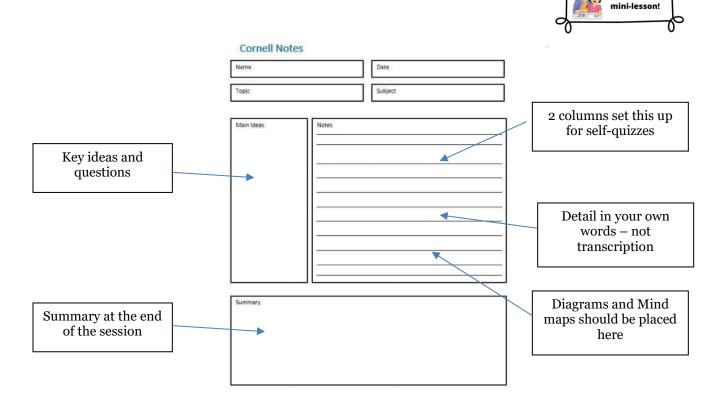


Teach this as a

The Cornell Method

This is the most widely used note-taking methods. A good note system encourages student interaction with the information and summarization of key ideas. As mentioned before, good notes are recorded in a way that makes them easier to review and use in the future. This lends to self-quizzing, recitation, and retrieval practice. Below is the layout of the Cornell Method.

You can make your kid's pages by using a ruler to create these sections on a blank sheet of lined paper, or you can purchase pads of paper already set up for it.



This is a proven method that is easy to learn. Watch some of the recommended videos on page 13 together, then talk about it. See exercises one and two on pages 11 and 12 of this Toolbox 4 for ideas on how to have some practice sessions while using it.

Categories
Questions
Vocabulary
Review/Test Alerts
Connections
Reminders
Leave space so you can add notes and review questions later on when studying.

Define telegraphic sentence:

Define telegraphic sentence:

This format is best suited for lecture notes or chapter/unit review notes.

Summary
- five most important points of the topic, chapter, lecture
- questions you need to answer

Here is another template that illustrates how the sections should be used.

Cornell Notes Template

Checklist of Ideas to Explore

Explore some of these ideas and discuss them:

- □ Discuss the **5 Rs** of note-taking and integrate this into review activities in your classroom. Practice this until it becomes a comfortable habit.
- □ Explain and practice using the **Cornell Method** for note-taking in your classroom.
- □ Both of you read a chapter or article on taking Cornell notes. Then compare.
- \square Show your child how to take notes with mind maps.
- □ Set up an organizing system with the idea that it becomes your "**second brain.**"
- ☐ How to incorporate spaced practice and retrieval practice in your system?







Teach this as a mini-lesson!

Note Taking - Make it Fun!

Practicing note-taking can be easy and fun! Let's face it, introducing fun elements to learning



makes it easier to teach and practice better learning habits. We've developed some fun exercises for you that you can use to teach and coach better study habits that support lifelong learning. So, put on your "self-scientists" hats and try some of these ideas!

Let's begin with a reminder of the 4 principles to making learning fun:

- 1. Provide hands-on learning activities
- 2. Let your child lead the way
- 3. Be colorful and visual
- *4. Incorporate games into the experience*

Try these Exercises to Improve Note Taking

These fun exercises will help you integrate better note taking strategies into your kid's study efforts and plans. First, watch several of the videos on note-taking and then explain the Cornell method and the importance of summarizing information in your own words. Here are some suggestions you can use to make this more creative and fun:





Cornell Note Exercises

Using a short story is a great way to practice this method.

For younger kids, read the story while each child takes notes using the *Cornell method*. For older kids, give them the reading and have them take notes as they go.



Provide copies of the Cornell note sheets to use. (you can print them from the internet or make your own with a ruler.) The kids should work independently without talking or sharing.

Emphasize the recording of information in all 3 areas -1) bullets on the right, 3) main ideas on the left and 3) the summarization of important ideas at the bottom. All notes must be in the kid's own words - no transcribing the points unless a quote is useful to capture a key point.

When they are ready, ask your kids, one at a time, to share their notes and explain what they wrote and why. Then compare the different approaches. Guide a discussion and ask which ideas better captured the information and why. Take the best examples from each child (everyone contributes) and list them on the board for more discussion on why these are better examples of good note-taking. Remember: this learning experience is how to capture and write better notes, not who did the best.

Begin this series with an easy and familiar story that first builds confidence, then select another more difficult and new reading to work on.





Movie Night Exercise!

Lead a fun learning exercise watching a movie **you know** as a study case in taking notes. This is similar to exercise one but is more nuanced and works better for teens. Movies or even TV shows can be fun training tools for note-taking, and they have lots of content you can use.



- Select an appropriate movie for the kids, from dramas and comedies, or animations, with interesting characters and plot twists.
- Next, choose a note-taking format like the *Cornell method*, then provide copies for each.
- Provide your kids instructions on what kind of notes to take during the entire movie. For example, ask each child to make notes on <u>four things</u>: 1) note what the story is about, 2) describe each of the main characters in the movie, 3) note what each did to advance the plot, and (this last one is interesting because it provokes the most thinking) 4) describe each main character's likely motivation for doing what they did.
- Ask each to individually take notes during the movie using good note-taking techniques. No transcribing or quoting the characters – everything must be in their own words.
- Pause the movie several times at important transition points to the plot and give your kids a few minutes to time to think and record ideas, but again without discussion or sharing.
- Show the movie, and at the end give a little more time to improve and summarize their notes. This is an important step to better memory.
- After a break, hold a roundtable discussion where each child will share and explain his notes. Take one criterion at a time so you can explore who did a better job of capturing information and why. Don't emphasize right and wrong focus on getting better.
- Compare ideas and extract insights on how to take *better* notes. Remind them that good note-taking improves memory and recall of information.

3

The 5 Rs of Note-taking



Build a lesson around this method. You will want to read and become familiar with this technique before starting the exercise. Pick new material on a <u>subject that your kids like</u>. You can use lecture, as the model suggests, or substitute independent reading of a chapter. But use content that is important so your time doing this is well spent.

Next, walk your kids through the 5-step process, explaining each step one at a time. Remember this system is not only a note-taking system, but a *process for learning*. You can personalize this for each kid, or you can use the same material if your kids are of similar ages and interests.

Remember this is an exercise in note-taking <u>and</u> how to learn faster. Allow 20-25 minutes for each step, followed by a short break. You can spread this out over 3 days if you wish.

Day 1

Record - The first step is to provide the lecture while your kids take notes using a system like the Cornell method.



Reduce – On their own, have them write a summary of ideas and facts from their notes and memory. Process and improve these notes through a discussion. Compare ideas produced by different kids.

Day 2

Recite – Let the kids go into private spaces and practice recitation to improve memory and recall.

Reflection – Get the kids together and have another discussion on the material, this includes some review, but also trying to find new insights. Give them a little time to think about the last step.

Day 3

Review – In a group, roundtable and have each kid present the main ideas from the original lecture in their own words. This should <u>not</u> be from reading their original notes. You can have them speak from bullets on note cards, or better, ask them to work from memory.

Debrief - In the last step, have a conversation on how well this approach worked to improve your understanding and enhancing memory and recall. Talk about the implications of this to other homework and studies.



Cursive vs Computer Competition

If you are ambitious and you have lots of kids, try this "self-scientist" experiment which duplicates the methods used by scientists during their research.



Explain the purpose of the experiment. Choose a *short* reading that has details, facts, and/or numbers that will need to be captured by the kids.

- Assign to each kid to one of two groups either A) the **cursive handwritten group**, or B) the **laptop group** using their own system. Set this up as a fun competition where you will compare results and discuss ideas. The more kids the better the energy.
- Arrange the room so each child cannot see the notes of the others. Start your experiment by reading the short story at a slow but deliberate pace. This is not a lecture, so your kids <u>can't ask questions</u>. Their job is to take notes each using only the designated method.
- When you call out "stop!" they must close their notes and then take a short break. This allows a little time for the *forgetting curve* to kick in. You want this to occur.
- Next, <u>without looking at their notes</u>, have each child take out a blank sheet of paper, and individually list as many details and facts as they can remember from the story. You will do this with both groups to see which method produced better memory.
- After every kid has finished, place the notes a big table where everyone can see the completed sheets of paper. Organize notes by Group A cursive on one side, and those by Group B computer on the other. Discuss which resulted in better memory.

Put on your self-scientist hats and try to discover what happened and why.

The science tells us the kids that took cursive notes should do better. Did you get this result? If not, discuss why, and consider repeating the learning experiment.

Get a "Jumpstart" to Better Note-Taking



Turn these videos into mini-lessons about better notetaking. Watch them and have conversations about what you will do differently at home to build a better system.



- 1. This is a useful reference on the fundamentals of note-taking. Use it as a reading then have a short lesson discussion on what we should do differently.
 - https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/effective-note-taking-in-class/
- 2. Here is an excellent 6-minute video to watch with your child on the Cornell Method.

 Cornell Method.
- 3. How to use the Cornell method to take information from an encyclopedia. The Life of a wolf. A very deliberate demonstration that provides good examples.
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPSmXRIlyS8
- 4. This is a basic video on the Cornell note method: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lu7WM fmR1k
- 5. Merging Cornell Method and *Sketchnoting* from Verbal to Visual https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZgMpjjgCRA (10 minutes)
- 6. A good overview of note-taking in class. Emphasis on Cornell notes. 6:38 min.

https://www.google.com/search?source=hp&ei=niMBXbHuMIn - gSok5rIDA&q=how+to+take+good+notes&oq=how+to+take+good+notes&gs_l =psy-ab.12..ol10.7198.12179..12672...1.0..0.90.1841.23.....0...1..gws-wiz.....6..35i39joi131joi131i67joi67.dFOXMAtbYD4#kpvalbx=1

- 7. Good general tips on setting up a note-taking system. (7 minutes) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njstk6xlrho
- 8. Mind mapping video with the author of this strategy.

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5Y4pIsXTVo
- 9. A 3-minute animated video on mind mapping.

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCKZ75VDaSI

After these exercises turn your new knowledge into a better system for your child!

