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Students – Are You Taking Notes the Wrong Way?

By Royane Real

When you study, do you take notes the old fashioned way, writing down everything you think is important? There are many ways of taking notes, and for some people, the most effective way to remember a lot of information is to make learning maps or mind maps. Find out how.

If you are a university or college student, you probably make a lot of notes when you are attending classes or reading your text books. Then later you review the notes you made when you are preparing for exams.

You may have wondered if there a right way or a wrong way to take notes. Does one method of note-taking work better than another?

There is probably no one way that works best for all people in all situations, since everyone's brain is so unique.

The main problem with taking notes the traditional way is that this is a very passive process. Simply taking notes does not get the brain very involved in interacting with the information. If you can get your brain to get more actively involved in organizing the new material you will remember it better.

If you are strong in visual learning, you can benefit from making notes that include lots of graphs and drawings, even cartoons! If you are very high in auditory skills and weak in the visual area you will do better by tape-recording all the notes you need to remember.

The following technique for note-taking is particularly effective for people who are highly visual. This method of making notes is sometimes called mind-mapping or making a learning map.

Although it takes some practice to use mind-mapping effectively, most people who use it find they can retain and remember far more information with a lot less work.

The essence of the learning-map (also known as memory-map, or mind-map) technique is quite simple. You will need a blank piece of paper, the larger the better. You will need at

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least one pen, more if you want to use a variety of colors.

You will be trying to fill the entire page with your notes, so it is important to keep the size of your writing quite small. With practice you should be better able to judge what size of writing will work effectively.

As you listen to the lecturer, or read the article you are studying, decide what you think the central theme is. For example, you might be listening to a lecture where you decide the central theme seems to be, *Conditions in Europe on the eve of World War 2*

Or you might be listening to a talk that has a central theme of *Strategies that plants use to survive winter*

Once you have decided what the central theme is, jot down the words in the center of the page, and draw a circle around the main theme. Don't try to write down a sentence or a paragraph—just get

down enough of the key words that will bring the ideas back into you mind.

Keep listening or reading, watching for the first main sub-theme.

When you come across the first major sub-theme, pick a spot on the page to jot down a few key words that sum up the sub-theme. Draw a circle around the sub-theme words, and then join your sub-theme circle to the main theme circle with a line.

Each time you come across a new major sub-theme, write down a few key words to summarize the new idea, and draw a circle around those words. Then draw a line to join the sub-theme circle to the main idea circle in the center of the page. Eventually you will have a circle in the center with several spokes radiating from it.

The lines or spokes don't have to be straight, and they can be of any length required. The circles don't have to be circles; they can be squares, triangles, or oval squiggles if you prefer. You can use different colors to help you organize the ideas better.

As the speaker or writer continues to present his ideas, you will find that some of the ideas being presented are additional supporting details that clarify or illustrate one of the sub-themes you have already identified. In this case you will write these sub-sub-themes down using just a few words, enclose them in a circle or squiggle, and link them to their sub-theme with a line.

Eventually your sub-theme circles may have many spokes radiating from them as the author or lecturer continues to present his ideas. At a glance you will be able to take in the dominant themes of the talk and the underlying organizational structure of the ideas.

If you happen to have any ideas of your own while you are reading or listening to the lecture, jot them down as well. This shows you have your brain actively interacting with the material.

When you make a mind map or a learning map of all your notes, you create a very visual document

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that differs a lot from traditional methods of making notes for class.

People who learn very well visually will particularly benefit from the way that learning maps clearly show the relationships between main themes, sub–themes and supporting facts and ideas.

Try this method and see if this is the note–taking technique that works best for you!

This article was written by learning expert Royane Real. If you want to improve your learning, get her new short report *Your Quick Guide to Improving Your Learning Ability* at

<http://www.lulu.com/real>

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Just What Is a Learning Disability, Anyway?

By Sandy Gauvin

Just What Is a Learning Disability, Anyway? by Sandy Gauvin

A learning disability is defined as a permanent problem that affects a person with average to above average intelligence, in the way that he/she receives, stores, and processes information.

There are many wrong ideas out there about learning disabilities.

1) A learning disability will go away in time.

Unfortunately, this is not true. The good news is, you can learn ways to get around the problem. For example, kids who have trouble taking notes in class, like Michele did, can record the class on audiotape. Or, other students can make copies of the notes they have taken for them. The teacher can make copies the notes they are lecturing from. Or, when the notes are written down on an overhead transparency during the lecture, they can be copied after class and given to the student.

For children who have trouble reading, tapes of many of the textbooks are made available through the publishing companies. At one school where I taught, volunteers did the taping. We also used tapes that were recorded by a company called Recordings for the Blind.

2) A person with a learning disability has a low IQ.

Again, not true. In order for a person to have a learning disability, they have to have an average or better IQ. There are many people who, although they intelligent, just cannot learn as well as their IQ suggests they should. I've told my students for a long time that having a learning disability is really a compliment because it means that they are very smart! But, since a negative by–product of a learning disability is often low self–esteem, they didn't always believe me.

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Remember: the self-esteem issue is as important to deal with as the learning disability itself!

3) A person with a learning disability is just lazy.

There has to be a reason why the person with LD doesn't learn the way he should. Perhaps his brain doesn't process the information the right way. He may process information much slower than other people. Or he may not be able to process what he sees effectively. Some people can't process what they hear as well as what they see. Other people can't remember information unless it's repeated again and again, and some people have real trouble getting the information out of that filing system they have in their brain.

Typically people with learning disabilities work harder than others – but with lesser results. It's not about hard work – it's a learning disability.

4) A person with a learning disability can't do anything right.

Even though a child may have a learning disability in one or two areas, it doesn't mean they can't do anything right. My daughter struggled with a disability in math, but what a wonderful writer she is! And she has more knowledge about how to get around a computer than many people have. I envy that ability because I think I have a learning disability in that area!

I've known students who, even though they struggled with math or reading, were excellent around heavy equipment or automobile engines or carpentry or drafting. Many could do things with a computer that seemed impossible.

The important thing is that, if your child has a learning disability, or even if you suspect he might have one, learn everything you can so that you will know what to expect and what not to expect from him as well as from his teachers and his educational program. That way you will be able to understand and help him in the best way possible.

While none of us wants to consider the fact that our child might have a learning disability, it's the intelligent approach to take. When you recognize the truth about learning disabilities, you'll know how to maximize your child's abilities and minimize their dis-abilities.

For ways to be an advocate for your child, read "Advocating For Your Child With LD" at www.LDPerspectives.com.

Sandy Gauvin is a retired educator who has seen learning disabilities from many perspectives – as the parent of a daughter with learning disabilities, as the teacher of children with learning disabilities, and as an advocate for others who have diagnosed and unrecognized learning disabilities. Sandy shares her wisdom and her resources at www.LDPerspectives.com

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