

## Overview

Notetaking is the practice of capturing important pieces of information in a systematic way. It is not limited to the classroom. Notetaking is an important accommodation in any situation requiring learning, including job sites and internships. Effective notetaking is a skill that is acquired through training and strengthened through practice. It is an accommodation that individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on when they are in an environment of learning. In fact, research conducted with college students who were deaf indicates that most students view note-taking as a *very useful* support.<sup>i</sup>

## Why is notetaking such an important accommodation?

As visual communicators, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing access auditory information by focusing on interpreters, the speaker or real time captioning. Engaging in visual communication requires a high level of concentration, and obtaining information visually during large stretches of time can be exhausting. Taking notes requires the visual communicator to engage in an additional level of concentration (notetaking) *and* forces them to divert their eyes from the source of information.

Providing a notetaker allows the individual the freedom to focus on the content being presented. Providing a *trained* notetaker assures the individual that the written record of core concepts, key points, and supporting details will be more accurately captured.

We often forget that one functioning element of the eye is a muscle, while the ear's primary element is its nerves. Utilizing a nerve requires no physical energy; muscles are subject to fatigue. Time can take its toll on students who are deaf or hard of hearing. It simply takes more physical energy to critically observe than to listen.

## Who is qualified to take notes?

In its most basic form, a qualified notetaker is one who is intelligent, reliable, and able to produce legible, clearly organized, accurate notes. In a classroom setting, postsecondary education institutions often ask a student who is enrolled in the same course to serve as a notetaker, — volunteer or paid. Employers may assign notetaking duties to a co-worker or use clerical staff. Yet, according to Western Michigan University, effective notetaking is one of the most difficult tasks for students to accomplish. They do not know what is pertinent, what to write, nor how to structure it.<sup>ii</sup>

In the same research study noted above, students, who were deaf, shared examples of unreadable notes and inaccuracies and delays in receiving notes when untrained peers were utilized. They expressed frustration with volunteers who were absent or who arrived late to class. They felt notes done by trained notetaker were more helpful than those taken by untrained peers. In some cases, but certainly not all, electronic notes (transcripts) created by speech-to-text providers were seen to be effective and a preference to in-class notetaking.

Given this knowledge, a qualified notetaker is one who possesses these cognitive abilities *and* has some level of training in the art and science of taking notes.



## Personal and Cognitive Characteristics of a Good Notetaker:

- Has excellent attendance and punctuality
- Is a good speller and writes legibly
- Has good listening skills
- Can stay on task over extended periods of time
- Has good organizational skills and enjoys thinking organizationally
- Has the ability to maintain confidentiality
- Has the ability to maintain a good rapport with the student and the professor

## Where can a prospective notetaker receive training?

Most academic institutions offer general training for students wishing to improve their notetaking abilities. While training specific to providing notetaking for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing is preferred, this type of training is advantageous in lieu of no training.

pn2 recommends that prospective notetakers take its **Online Notetaker Training**. The **Online Notetaker Training** is a self-guided training that defines the role of the notetaker; delivers information about hearing loss; and provides notetaking strategies that elicit accurate, comprehensive notes specifically for individuals with disabilities. The training can be completed in multiple sessions or in one sitting. When individuals are confident they have learned the material, an online quiz evaluates their notetaking knowledge. A passing score will earn a "Verification of Training Completion" certificate.

## The Law

While it can be a stand-alone accommodation for some individuals, notetaking does not take the place of other needed accommodations, such as interpreters and captioning. Notetaking is regarded as an "auxiliary aid" as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## What Notetaking is not

Notetaking does not imply tutoring will also occur. Notetaking does not substitute for classroom attendance.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Powell, D., Hyde, M., & Punch, R. (2014). Inclusion in Postsecondary Institutions with Small Numbers of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students: Highlights and Challenges. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 19(1): 126-140.
- <sup>2</sup> Powell, D., Hyde, M., & Punch, R. (2014). Inclusion in Postsecondary Institutions with Small Numbers of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students: Highlights and Challenges. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 19(1): 126-140.

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