

# Note Taking: An Introduction

**TS**  
Tip Sheet

## Overview

Note taking is the practice of capturing important pieces of information in a systematic way. It is not limited to the classroom. Note taking is an important accommodation in any situation requiring learning, such as on the job and through internships. Effective note taking is a skill that is acquired through training and strengthened through practice. It is an accommodation that deaf individuals rely on when they are in an environment of learning. In fact, research conducted with deaf college students indicates that most students view note taking as a *very useful* support.<sup>1</sup>

## Why is note taking such an important accommodation?

As visual communicators, deaf individuals 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 (note taking) and forces them to divert their eyes from the source of information.

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

We often forget that the primary element of the eye is a muscle, whereas the primary element of the ear is its nerves. Using a nerve requires no physical energy; muscles are subject to fatigue. Time can take its toll on deaf students. It simply takes more physical energy to critically observe than to listen.

## Who is qualified to take notes?

A qualified note taker 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 volunteer or paid note taker. Employers may assign note taking duties to a coworker or clerical staff.

Effective note taking is a difficult task for students to accomplish, according to a study conducted by Western Michigan University. Note takers showed that they did not know what to write or how to structure it.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, deaf students shared examples of unreadable notes containing inaccuracies. They expressed frustration with volunteers who were absent or who arrived late to class. There were also delays in receiving notes when untrained peers were used. They felt notes done by trained note takers were more helpful than those done 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 were preferred to in-class note taking.

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



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## Personal and Cognitive Characteristics of a Good Note Taker

- 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 note taker receive training?

Most academic institutions offer general training to students who wish to improve their note taking abilities. Although training specific to providing note taking for deaf individuals is preferred, general training is better than no training.

NDC recommends that prospective note takers complete our online note taker course, a self-guided training that defines the role of the note taker and provides strategies for producing accurate, comprehensive notes specifically for individuals with disabilities. The training can be completed in multiple sessions or in one sitting. When individuals feel confident that they have learned the material, they can take an online quiz that evaluates their note taking knowledge. A passing score will earn a certificate of completion.

For more information about online learning opportunities visit [www.nationaldeafcenter.org/learn](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/learn).

## What does the law say about note taking?

Note taking is regarded as an “auxiliary aid” as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## How is note taking different from other accommodations?

Although note taking can be a stand-alone accommodation for some individuals, it does not take the place of other needed accommodations, such as interpreters and captioning.

Note taking does not imply tutoring will also occur. Note taking is not a substitute for classroom attendance.

## Reference

- <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.



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Additional resources can be found at [www.nationaldeafcenter.org](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org)