

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Teaching Technique 42

Note-Taking Pairs

ACTIVITY TYPE

- Active/Engaged Learning
- Note Taking

TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED

- Poor Note Taking
- Poor Attention/Listening

LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Foundational Knowledge

Note-Taking Pairs

In *Note-Taking Pairs*, student partners work together to improve their individual notes.

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- 1 Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for *Note-Taking Pairs*
 - 2 Develop prompts based on your lecture content
 - 3 Set assignment parameters and share with students
 - 4 Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading
 - 5 Communicate assignment instructions to students
 - 6 Implement the technique
 - 7 Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Being able to take good notes is an important skill, yet many students are poor note takers. The purpose of this technique is to provide students with a structured activity to pool information, fill in gaps, check for and correct mistakes, and help each other learn to be better note takers. In *Note-Taking Pairs*, student partners work together to improve their individual notes. Working with a peer provides students with an opportunity to revisit and crosscheck notes with another source. Partners help each other acquire missing information and correct inaccuracies so that their combined effort is superior to their individual notes.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

Note-Taking Pairs was originally designed to improve lecture notes. However, it also may be used to help students improve their notes on reading assignments and other kinds of learning activities. Develop prompts based on the content on which students will take notes.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

One of the most important aspects of this technique is to ensure that both partners contribute something to the notes; otherwise, one student will feel disadvantaged by the activity. Be sure to specify this prior to presenting the lecture or other content and asking students to work together. Consider providing students with guidance about how to take good notes in either a mini lecture or a handout or with examples of effective notes.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

To assess learning, consider using the Minute Paper method (CAT 6, Angelo & Cross, 1993, pp. 148–153) ask students to respond in writing to two questions:

- 1. What is the most important suggestion you got from your peer?
- 2. What do you think is the most helpful suggestion you gave to your peer?

If the major purpose of the exercise is to improve written note-taking skills, occasionally collect notes before the peer conversation and again after. Or to simplify your review, ask students to highlight or indicate what changes they made as a result of discussion with a peer. If you are more interested in assessing the quality of the peer suggestions, ask students to hand in one set of their notes with suggestions by their peer made in a different-color pencil

Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

If students will take notes on a lecture, you can simply tell students how often you will pause for them to compare notes. If they will complete their own notes out of class and compare in class, tell them that in advance.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Students individually take notes of the major points from a body of content, such as a lecture or a text chapter.
- Students form pairs, at your direction or by choosing partners.
- Partner A begins by summarizing the main points from a section of the content to Partner B, who offers corrections and additional information.
- Partner B summarizes the next section, and Partner A offers corrections and additional information.
- The partners continue to alternate sharing summaries, corrections, and additional information until they have completed checking their notes.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique. For *Note-Taking Pairs*, we are providing you with ideas to vary it.

VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

- Ask student pairs to sit together during the lecture. At various times throughout the lecture, stop and ask partners to participate in the activity. You can offer specific prompts, such as “Ask each other what was the major point so far and make sure that that point is clear in your notes.” This technique keeps students’ attention focused on the lecture and allows students to rehearse the information and to correct any misinformation or perceptions.
- Give students overnight to revisit their notes to make revisions and corrections and to add information before sharing the notes with a peer. This will allow students to clarify their own thoughts and to make their writing more legible before sharing their notes with another.
- Consider making your lecture notes available to student pairs after using this technique for students to recheck and thus revisit their notes a third time.
- If you do not wish to use in-class time for students to compare notes, tell students to share their notes outside of class through e-mail attachments or a shared folder, such as through Google Docs, Box, or Dropbox. Students can copy and paste notes into a single partner version, using different font styles or colors to distinguish individual contributions.
- Use this technique for students to review homework assignments, to check answers to homework problems at the beginning of class, or to review for a test.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Claire Major adapted *Note-Taking Pairs* in her course, *College and University Teaching*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample *Note-Taking Pairs* Completed Technique Template:

Content from Claire Major

College and University Teaching

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

This is a graduate-level course that meets 4 times per term and is supplemented with online activities; it is a hybrid course. Most students plan to seek out faculty roles upon graduation.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

*Since this course is a doctoral-level course, I assign a good bit of reading. Students come from different disciplines and fields, and not all of them are familiar with social science research reports. Therefore, I assign *Note-taking Pairs* to help structure their reading.*

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

The prompts I use for the assignment focus on the specific readings I have assigned.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

I would typically assign prompt questions for students to complete as they read the research report. Then I ask them to compare notes.

Big picture:

- 1. What is the purpose of the study?*
- 2. What was the primary research approach?*
- 3. What were the key findings?*
- 4. What are the major conclusions?*

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS (CON'T)

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

Context:

5. *Authoritativeness: Is the source of the study a well-respected one (how do you know)? Are the authors' credentials appropriate for the study at hand? (How do you know?)*
6. *Biases: What are the authors' potential biases? Consider places of employment, statements of funding sources, acknowledgments, or the nature of the publication itself? How might these potential biases affect the study or the conclusions?*

Argument and Approach:

8. *Methods: Do the methods align with the study goals? Was the sample chosen appropriately? Did the authors explain their approach for data collection and analysis? Did the authors ensure that their results and conclusions are plausible (if so, how?)*
9. *Results and Conclusions: Do the results adequately support the claims? Are the claims over-stated in light of the study details? Are there other reasonable interpretations of the findings?*

Implications: Given the aims of the project and what you know from reading the study, what is its primary value? What should stakeholders do, if anything, about the findings and conclusions?

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

I typically do this as an in-class assignment and so attempt to gauge how well students are contributing to each others' notes. I do a minute paper at the end of the activity to ask about the benefits of the collaboration.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

I provide them with a handout of the prompts to use while they are reading the article. I announce the activity in class.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

After students have read the assignment as homework and completed the form, I simply put them in pairs and ask them to work with each other to improve their responses.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

To reflect on the technique, I think through whether the notes appeared to help students record more useful information than they would have done alone. They almost always do. I encourage students to think through what their partners noticed about the research report that they didn't.

Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **Note-Taking Pairs** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

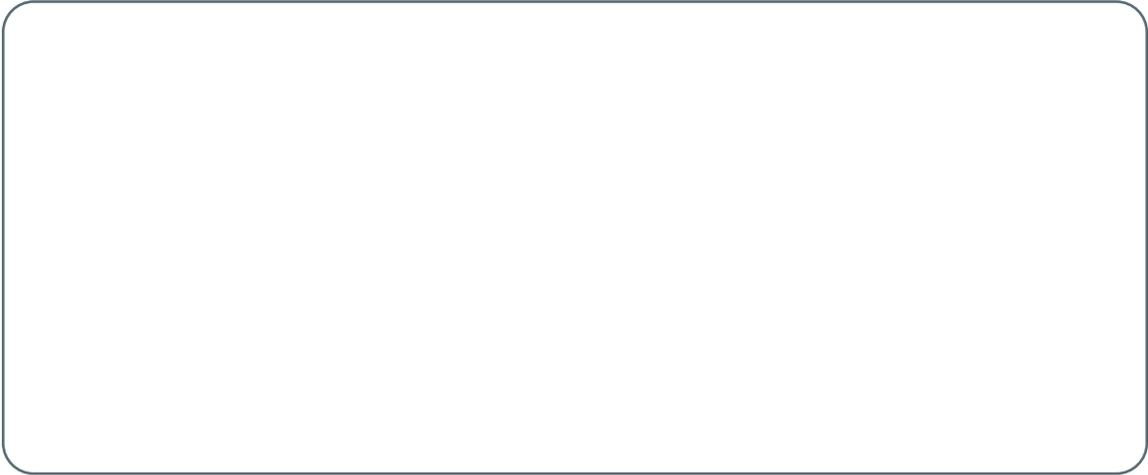
What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

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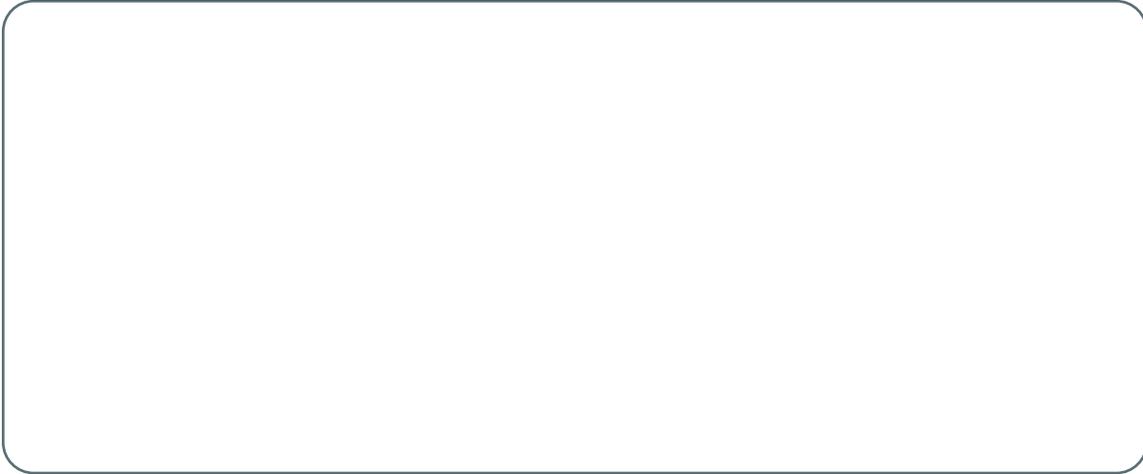
STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?



STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?



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STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?



References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Collaborative Learning Technique 7: Note Taking Pairs” in *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley & Major, 2014), pp. 189–194. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E., & Major, C.H. (2014). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley/Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Friedman, M. C. (n.d.). Notes on note-taking: Review of research and insights for students and instructors. Retrieved from hilt.harvard.edu/files/hilt/files/notetaking_0.pdf
- Missouri State University. (2014). Cornell note-taking [brochure]. Retrieved from www.missouristate.edu/assets/busadv2014/p.22-23.pdf
- University of Maine, Fort Kent. (n.d.). Cornell note-taking method. Retrieved from www.umfk.edu/learning-center/studying-tips/notes

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