



Making Your Notes Work for You

Good notes help you quiz yourself for upcoming exams. They have a clear, organized structure; distinguish main points from supporting details; indicate relationships among the different ideas discussed; and include examples and abbreviations when appropriate. Try using some of the following graphic organizers to make your notes more useful.

Use Tools to Recall Factual Information

While most exam questions will not ask you for definitions, it is necessary to know this information. You can practice vocabulary in a variety of ways.

1. Use 3x5 notecards with a word or concept on one side and the definition/picture on the other side. Online learning tools like Quizlet may also be used.

EXAMPLE 1:

Front of notecard

Timeline of lepidoptera development

Back of notecard

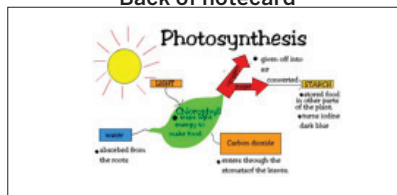
Egg → Larvae →
Pupa → Adult

EXAMPLE 2:

Front of notecard

Diagram of Photosynthesis

Back of notecard



2. Create a chart or matrix to identify similarities and differences between concepts.

EXAMPLE 3:

Chart/Matrix: The relationship between moths and butterflies

	Moths	Butterflies
Wings	Two sets	Two sets
Resting	Wings folded over	Wings straight up
Antennae	Feather	Long and thin
Development	Complete metamorphosis	Complete metamorphosis

Synthesize Concepts

Notes can be used to summarize or paraphrase the lecture. Try to make your notes meaningful and concise, in words you understand. Use several different sources to create your summaries.

EXAMPLE 4:

Describe how citizen values and beliefs shaped American government politics in the early 1900s

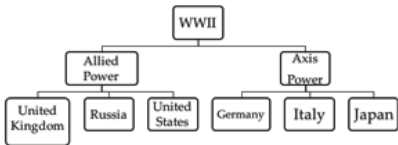
Major Points	Textbook	Lecture Notes	Synthesis
U.S. economy in late 19th and early 20th Century	Increase in industrial growth	Shift to large-scale production of manufactured goods.	Increase in industrial growth created need for large number of factory workers.
Working conditions in the late 19th and early 20th century	Factory workers – long hours, poor working conditions, job instability.	Industrial accidents killed and maimed thousands of workers, including child laborers.	Lack of effective government regulation led to unsafe and unhealthy work conditions.
Response to poor working conditions	Membership in American Federation of Labor grew rapidly (skilled labor)	Progressivism, a social movement, grew into a political movement.	A spirit of reform swept through the country, resulting in several States passing legislation helpful to laborers.

Draw a picture, diagram, or concept map

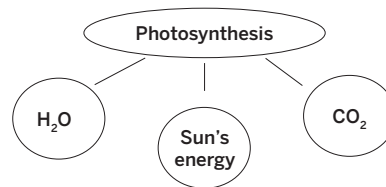
To create a concept map, identify the main topics, keeping in mind that some concepts are more important than others. Be sure that supporting concepts are defined and the relationships between them are explained. Creating concept maps is useful because you are recreating the information in a way that makes connections, shows relationships, and tells a story, which makes it easier to remember. Also, our memory for pictures or graphics is much better than our memory for text.

Note: concept maps can look different:

EXAMPLE 5:



EXAMPLE 6:



Concept maps can be used to quiz yourself. Fill out the main hubs, and try to explain the forces that are connected to this idea and why and how it is significant. Explaining concept maps out loud can also be a useful technique.

Before Exams

Summarize your diagrams, charts, etc. into a review sheet approximately two weeks before an exam. Try to recreate them from memory.

Your turn! Using your notes as the initial material, ask yourself these questions and use an organizer that matches your course and content:

1. What is the main point of this lecture/chapter?
2. What are examples/details that support that concept?
3. How does this connect to other things we've studied? Upcoming topics (on the syllabus) we're slated to cover?
4. What gaps do I need filled in to make my notes complete?