Story, Dale
Department of Political Science
University of Texas at Arlington

HOW TO STUDY

I am periodically asked for suggestions as to "How to Study" and/or "How to Take Notes."
My most universal comments are these:

1. There is no universal and perfect method. In fact, I would submit that each person needs to determine the style and approach that works best for them.
2. Just Do It! However you study and take notes, you clearly need to do so. Even if your professor provides power-points, summaries, outlines, sample questions, etc., do not rely exclusively on those. Have your own, detailed notes from class and all readings.
3. Always attend class and arrive on-time.
4. In terms of the average time-commitment, most educators agree that you should devote at least two hours outside of class for every hour in class during a regular Fall or Spring semester. For example, you should devote a total of 9 hours per week for a "3 hour-credit" course. Or a total load of 15 hour-credits would be equivalent to a 45 hour work week.

Having said that you should determine the approach that best fits you, I am glad to briefly overview some of the strategies that I have utilized. But, again, I am not recommending these for any particular student—these methods are only examples.

1. I will use an 8.5x11 inch, yellow legal pad and a blue or black pen to take notes in-class. I do not even attempt to write every word—I need to listen as much (or more) than I write. As I understand them, I will separate the main ideas and topics with a line or paragraph indention. If the professor has provided some type of summary, I will use that as a guide for organizing my notes. I will focus on the "main points"—but also try to note evidence regarding that point <u>and examples</u>. I have always felt that examples are one of the most helpful ways to remember and understand a concept, topic, idea, and the like. I have many of my own favorite abbreviations that I use in taking notes (e.g., govt is government, LA is Latin America, and on and on and on). I had a friend who took notes omitting every vowel as their form of "short-hand." I do not personally use a computer to take notes in class, but I can surely understand students who do. Also, I have never taped a lecture, but know students who claim to use audio tapes very effectively.
2. For all readings, I will use a yellow highlighter to emphasize sentences and passages which I think are the important ones. Some other strategies that I use are to asterisk or underline key points. And, again, I will review and even
3. While I do not use a computer to take notes in class, I will sometimes transcribe those notes to a word processing software. Or I will simply scan the notes. If I have a PDF file of a journal article, etc., I have a software program that allows me to highlight within that PDF file and save with those highlights.
4. Obviously, I will review my notes both during the week in which I have taken them and before the exam that covers those notes. Often, I will even jot down the main ideas on a separate piece of paper as I am reviewing my notes. You might equate this to the "Cue" or "Recall" column suggested in the Cornell Note-Taking Method.
5. When I am reading material or reviewing notes (essentially any studying outside of class), I much prefer a quiet environment. In fact, I would prefer a space as far away from other people

as possible. In the library, I was notorious for finding a study table in the highest floor and the farthest corner—where no one else goes.

6. Finally, even these examples are not sacrosanct with me. I will often find myself trying some different approaches in various circumstances. Even amongst individuals, they might find one way fits a particular situation but not another situation.

Obviously, a plethora of sources exists on the web and in book-stores on other strategies. Purely anecdotal, but I hear many people praising the "Cornell Note-Taking Method." Here are two web pages on that approach:

1. http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/enreadtp/Cornell.html
2. http://lsc.sas.cornell.edu/Sidebars/Study_Skills_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf

And, I simply searched for "How to Study" and found many other sites on the topic. Among them:

1. http://www.howtostudy.org/
2. http://www.how-to-study.com/
3. http://www.howtostudy.com/
4. http://www.cse.buffalo.edu/~rapaport/howtostudy.html

And each of these will lead you to others.

In perusing all of these, you will discover that no magic elixir exists. You will need to settle on a style (or combination of methods) that work best for you.