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# **Notetaker Training**

## **2019 - 2020**



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
The Centre for Accessibility

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## **1. Introduction to The Centre for Accessibility & Notetaking Program**

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The Centre for Accessibility facilitates disability-related accommodations and programming initiatives designed to remove barriers for students with disabilities and ongoing medical conditions. Academic accommodations help students with a disability or ongoing medical condition overcome challenges that may affect their academic success.

Note-taking is an essential support service for many students with disabilities. The need a student may have for note-taking is determined by an Accessibility Advisor, based on documented disability and needs assessment. Notetaker eligibility is based on the functional impact of the disability and how it relates to the task of taking notes. Factors such as hearing the instructor; seeing visual material; the physical ability to write/type notes; the ability to concentrate; fatigue, stamina and endurance are all considered.

The Centre for Accessibility pays note-takers, and has since 1991; some disability offices at other post-secondary institutions run volunteer note-taking programs. We pay note-takers in order to show that we value the services our note-takers provide and the quality of the notes they produce. These notes are different than usual class notes in their level of completeness and organization.

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## **2. Roles and Responsibilities at The Centre for Accessibility**

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### **2.1 Accessibility Advisors**

The Centre for Accessibility Advisors work one-on-one with students with documented disabilities to ensure their full access to education at UBC. Accessibility Advisors determine the accommodations to which a client is eligible (notetaking, hours per week of tutoring, time extensions for writing exams, adapted course materials or computer software, etc.) and assist clients in accessing these accommodations.

### **2.2 Student Assistant Coordinator**

The Student Assistant Coordinator works with Accessibility Advisors and the Operations Manager to hire and train student assistants including notetakers, mobility assistants, scribes, library assistants, and exam assistants. If you have any questions about your role as a notetaker or any aspect of the notetaking program, please contact the Student Assistant Coordinator at [access.assistants@ubc.ca](mailto:access.assistants@ubc.ca).

## 2.3 Notetakers

Notetakers provide a valuable academic service by creating clear and detailed class notes for students with disabilities at UBC, ensuring all students have equitable access to lecture material. Your job as a notetaker is to provide a clear and detailed record of information and discussion shared in each class. Class notes are to be emailed to your client within 48 hours. This includes lecture material and other details mentioned in class, particularly notes regarding class assignments and tests/exams.

It is your responsibility to ensure the client receives notes from each class. If you are absent you must arrange an alternate notetaker. It is helpful to choose a back-up student in advance.

As a note taker you are representing The Centre for Accessibility. Therefore you are expected to be confidential, cooperative, unbiased, and respectful to people with disabilities and to The Centre for Accessibility staff. Sexual, racial, and/or physical harassment will not be tolerated.

Notetakers are **not required** to provide:

1. Notes for readings outside of class (unless requested by the Student Assistant Coordinator)
2. Notes for labs (unless requested by the Student Assistant Coordinator)
3. Materials handed out during class
4. Tutoring, advising or advocacy services

Any requests by your client for additional services should be referred to the Student Assistant Coordinator.

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## 3. Elements of effective notetaking

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### 3.1 Appearance of notes

The most important aspect of the appearance of notes is legibility. So first of all, ensure that your handwriting (cursive script) is legible. If your client has difficulty reading it, consider printing.

Second, the more organized your notes are, the easier they are to understand. Here are some standard formatting cues you should use liberally to make the information clear to the reader:

- Different levels of indentations (to separate information)
- Headings and bullets (to organize information)
- Capitalization, underlining, and asterisks, used consistently (to help clarify the information being presented)
- Lists, diagrams, and illustrations

Finally, your pages should not be densely covered with notes. Take care to use wide margins and

to avoid cramming words onto the bottoms of pages. A good use of white space allows the note-taker or the client to add more information later.

There are some cases where clients are only able to access typed notes, you will be informed by the Student Assistant Coordinator if this is required. However, many notetakers do type their notes (especially in Arts) which avoids problems of illegible notes.

When emailing your scanned notes to your student it's probably best to use a scanner rather than taking photos of your notes with your phone which are sometimes blurry and difficult to read.

### **3.2 Content of notes**

Your notes should be as complete as possible. Your job is not to pull out and record only key information but to record as much information as you can, while highlighting the most important information.

As much as possible, the sequence of facts and information should make sense to the reader. The formatting tools we described above are not much use if the information is not complete or well ordered!

Do not repeat ideas but do repeat examples or new ways of saying the information.

If you miss information in a lecture, leave space in your notes to fill in later. Get the missing information from a classmate or seek clarification from the instructor.

### **Assignment and Tests**

It is particularly important to record in detail the following:

- Assignments given to the class including: due dates, scope of the assignment, and other information.
- Exam information: date, length, topic, and other important information.

### **3.3 Language**

To make your notes easy to understand, employ simple sentence constructions to facilitate reading comprehension. When you are unclear about a spelling put "sp?" beside the word in question. You can verify this later. Some symbols and abbreviations are acceptable but try to use them sparingly to avoid confusion. When you put symbols in your notes, make a legend of them like this:

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
&	and

Also, write verbs in the simple present or past tense and in the active voice:

- ✘ He had been having a bad day.
- ✔ He had a bad day.

Finally, avoid double negatives:

- ✘ It was not unforeseen
- ✔ It was unforeseen that

### **3.4 Mechanics of notetaking**

Be sure to follow these instructions when writing or typing your notes to improve their legibility and organization:

- Record course name and date at the top right corner of the first page
- Number each page
- Use one side only
- Write with a black fine-point pen, which is easy to read and reproduces well or type your notes
- Provide blank spaces
- At the last page put 'End of Session' to mark the end of your notes

### **3.5 Notetaking Tips (Before, During and After Lecture)**

#### **Before Class**

- 1) Check your course outline to see what topics will be discussed during the lecture.
- 2) Identify unfamiliar terms and concepts. Look up concepts ahead of time so you can follow along more easily when the instructor uses these terms.
- 3) Review your notes from the previous class to refresh your memory and make connections for the upcoming class.
- 4) Do the textbook readings before the class.
- 5) Get to class early and find a place where you can focus on the instructor and not be

distracted.

### **During the Lecture**

- 1) Do not try to write everything down but ensure your notes are detailed enough so you will understand them when you are studying for exams.
- 2) Listen for the main ideas and concepts and use these as headings. Instructors often give signals and cues when stating main ideas and important points.

Some common cues are:

- a) Summaries given at the beginning of the class – “Today we will cover..”
  - b) Information is written on the board.
  - c) Repetition – The same concept is mentioned several times.
  - d) Emphasis – The instructor may change his tone of voice; slow down and emphasize a particular point; and spend more time on a specific topic.
  - e) Word signals such as “It’s important to know that...”
- 3) Pay attention to how the instructor has organized the material. If the lecture is presented in an organized manner that moves from one point to the next point it’s helpful to use the outline format.

First Main Idea

A) First Main Supporting Point

- 1) Supporting Detail
- 2) Supporting Detail

Second Main Idea

B) Second Main Supporting Point

- 1) Supporting Detail
- 2) Supporting Detail

If it’s not well structured try to organize it yourself.

- 4) If you don’t understand something during class ask questions!

### **After the Lecture**

- 1) Edit your notes as soon as possible after the class so you don’t forget information. When editing your notes don’t simply recopy everything but spend time highlighting main ideas and adding more clarification to main points.
- 2) Some students find it helpful to summarize the information in their own words and to write potential test questions in the left hand margin.

### **3.6 Taking notes when online PowerPoint slides are provided**

Many instructors provide online notes and PowerPoint slides to assist all students in preparing for their classes and taking notes in class. Please remember the following tips if you are taking notes using online PowerPoint slides or other notes provided in advance by your instructor.

- Add any additional content given in class by the instructor or written on the matter.
- Add as much detail as possible.
- Notes can be added directly onto the PowerPoint handout if there is sufficient space. If not, use an additional sheet of paper. Check with your client to see if they have a preference.
- To allow for more space, sometimes it is helpful to print out fewer PowerPoint slides per page.
- Ensure your notes are neat and legible. Use a black pen or type your notes onto the slides.

### **3.7 Taking notes on a laptop**

If you are hired to take handwritten notes and a client requests that you take notes via a laptop computer, you are not required to do so. However, we are aware that increasing numbers of students are taking notes with their laptop. Please note that the same principles of organizing handwritten notes apply to taking notes via a computer.

If you provided typed notes with your application form it would be helpful to continue to provide typed notes, especially for Arts courses.

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## **4. Confidentiality**

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The BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act protects the privacy of personal information in the custody or under the control of a public body such as UBC. Personal information is any recorded information that uniquely identifies a person, such as their name, address, telephone number, age, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, or disability.

Notetakers must not give out any information about their clients to a third party. Such information includes, but is not limited to, clients' names and information about their



disabilities. Notetakers will not be given the client's name or any information about their client's disability. They will be given their client's email address which sometimes identifies the name of the client. If you are notetaking for more than one client please email your notes separately to each client or use the bcc field so your clients remain anonymous to each other.

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## **5. JOB DUTIES AND BOUNDARIES**

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Please remember that you are being hired by The Centre for Accessibility to perform an important service function. Your job as a notetaker is to record as accurately and readably as possible the information and discussion shared in class. Notetakers who are hired should demonstrate academic excellence and enthusiasm for learning and be open to feedback from your client. To achieve this, you can solicit feedback from your client on the quality and usefulness of the notes by emailing them at the beginning of the term.

You should not be supplementing your notes with class readings, etc. Nor is it your job to:

- tutor and review the course material (although you may be asked to clarify your notes)
- counsel or advise your client
- advocate for the client

Refer the client to their Accessibility Advisor for the above needs.

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## **6. Resources**

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- 1) This interactive guide from the UBC Learning Commons is an excellent entry point into how you may develop an effective strategy to achieve better note-taking skills.

<http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/student-toolkits-2/taking-notes/>

- 2) The University of Saskatchewan has a good resource list which lists resources from other post-secondary institutions on effective note taking strategies.

<https://libguides.usask.ca/c.php?g=353588&p=3437703>