



Note-taking: Why Some Students Struggle

Est. Time: 45 Minutes

Objective

To understand why some students, especially those with learning disabilities (LD), struggle with taking effective notes.

Overview

Note-taking is an effective way for students to retain and recall information. Taking notes helps students to organize and process important information and to actively engage with the material. This skill becomes increasingly important as students progress through school and are increasingly expected to learn information presented during lectures or to independently glean it from content-area textbooks (e.g., science or social studies). Because many teachers assume that students will learn how to take notes on their own, they often do not explicitly teach this skill. What these teachers might not know is that taking notes requires students to use a number of sub-skills:

- Sustained attention
- Ability to receive (written text or lecture) and process information (identifying main ideas and details) simultaneously
- Ability to comprehend the text
- Capacity to identify important information and determine what to write
- Organization and production of intelligible notes
- Handwriting (if using paper-and-pencil method) or computer skills

Because students with LD and ADHD tend to have difficulty with each of these sub-skills, they often have trouble taking notes effectively.

Activity

Identify at least one student who seems to have difficulty taking notes. After a lecture or assignment for which the students are expected to take notes compare that student's notes either to those taken by the teacher or by another student with good note-taking skills.



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Questions/Discussion Topics

1. Briefly describe the student's overall note-taking approach. For example, did he try to write down everything presented in the lecture or text or only the main ideas and relevant pieces of information?
2. Describe the differences between the student's notes and the one used for comparison.
3. In regard to the note-taking subskills listed above, identify and discuss potential deficits that might be affecting the student's ability to take effective notes.