

Create Opportunities for Using Notes

Even when we share with students the research behind note-taking and teach them how to effectively take notes, students may not realize that the greatest learning gains happen when they review and prioritize the content of their notes. Activities that provide students with opportunities to use their notes help them learn the importance of reviewing and organizing key points while also enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of the material. You can encourage increased understanding and retention by providing opportunities for students to use their notes.

Reference Cards

One way to provide students with the opportunity to use their notes is to encourage the use of reference cards during assessments. A reference card is a document created by the student to contain whatever information they deem most necessary to have during the module or course assessment.

To create a reference card, students review their notes, organize and prioritize the content, choose which notes they want to have during the assessment, and then write them onto the reference card. You can have them snap a picture of their reference card and send it to you if you are interested in seeing how they determine what is most important. Many students report feeling confident in their knowledge of the content and remembering the important notes just from the process of creating the reference cards.

Prioritizing Content

It may help to also provide students with a set of questions to ask themselves as they are determining which content to include on their reference cards. The table below is an example set of questions that can assist in prioritizing content.

1. Which learning goals will be assessed?
2. In what ways have I already applied the content for the learning goals?
3. What facts/formulas/references helped me better understand the learning objectives?
4. What supplemental information builds up to the learning goals?

In the act of reviewing and prioritizing their notes, students are analyzing the information and connecting it to their existing knowledge of the material, all of which assists in learning. In an online class, you can encourage students to take notes and create a reference card by having them submit it to you for a grade.