Effective note-taking is vital to ensuring collegiate success. Just like any skill, effective note-taking requires practice. However, there are core habits that strong note-takers share. By incorporating these habits, you’ll be able to take notes more effectively, which will allow you to retain more of your courses’ material.

Listening Habits:
The first step of effective note-taking is effective listening. By training yourself to be an attentive and active listener, you’ll be able to extract the most important information from lectures and take better notes. Some of the primary habits of good listeners include:

- **Listen for the Lecture’s Organization**: Just like written language, spoken language oftentimes has distinct organizational patterns. Most speakers begin by introducing a topic, discuss the topic’s main points, and transition from one point to another. Oftentimes these points will build upon each other as the lecture moves forward. Practice recognizing these patterns. Once you can discern the patterns of a lecture or speech, it will be easier for you to determine what the main points are.

- **Define the Lecture’s Main Points**: Your note-taking skills will most likely hinge on your ability to define a lecture’s primary points. If you try to record everything your professor says, you’ll only be overwhelmed and your notes will not be as helpful when you review them after class. Consequently, it’s important to consciously decide which points deserve to be noted and which points do not. In order to make that decision, you’ll first need to define a lecture’s main points while listening.

- **Avoid Distractions**: Do your best to discipline yourself and avoid distractions. Do not sit through class passively; listening should be an active exercise. As your professor speaks, listen actively: ask questions, try to relate the main points to past ideas, and determine how the individual lecture impacts your understanding of the topic as a whole. By practicing active listening techniques, it will become much easier for you to focus and avoid becoming distracted.

Note-Taking Habits:
Even if you’re a great listener, it’s still important to know how to take notes that will be valuable to you days—or even weeks—after a lecture. Here are some tips to help you develop your note-taking skills:

- **Only Note the Main Points**: Do not try to record everything your professor says. You’ll only become overwhelmed and your notes will not be as valuable when you reference them later. Identify the main points of the lecture and include these points in your notes. If there are sub-points that relate to, or make up, a main point, include these points as well. However, do your best to filter out introductory or transitional information.
• **Identify Relationships:** Do your best to ascertain how points and sub-points relate to each other. These relationships will help you develop a stronger understanding of the material. Also, by determining how points are related to each other, you’ll be able to organize your notes in a way that makes sense. Use Venn Diagrams, group definitions together, draw arrows between ideas, or color code different sections. Being able to group your ideas together will make future references to the notes easier.

• **Organize your Notes for later Reference:** Dating your notes or underlining main points are quick ways to make referring back to your notes much more efficient. While taking notes, try to create a system that will make later reference easier. Indent sub-points below main points and make sure that related ideas are grouped together. However, make sure that your organization methods do not get in the way of your actual note-taking. If you notice yourself taking more time to organize your notes than actually writing them, try switching a simple bullet-point method. Stick to methods that are fast but effective.