

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
TRAINING CENTER PROGRAM
ALBRIGHT TRAINING CENTER

How To Take Notes

The intelligent taking of classroom notes will go a long way to increase the value of this training experience. The success or failure of this program will not be indicated by the granting of a certificate of completion, but will be measured largely by the extent to which your efficiency as a park ranger or park interpreter has been increased as a result of the training. The more knowledge and useful information which you can take back to your park area with you, the more efficient you should be. But your efficiency will not only depend upon your ability to learn and retain information, it will also depend upon your ability to organize this material for practical use.

It would be an impossibility for anyone to come to this training program and retain all the information imparted without some special method of recording and organizing it into a workable reference source. Almost all subjects will be supplemented by a written paper which will be handed to you either before or after the particular session, depending upon the wishes of the individual instructor. However, on many occasions the subject matter treated orally during the period may be quite different from the written material presented. Classroom discussion, as well as "asides" offered by the instructor may prove very valuable. It is our hope that the supplemental papers will in turn be supplemented by classroom notes which were taken at the time of the oral presentation. The purpose of this paper is to offer you a practical method of keeping and organizing a notebook which will help to increase your day to day effectiveness in your job.

What are some of the uses for your notes?

Everyone has at one time or another been faced with the problem of trying to find information he knows he has tucked away some place but just can't remember where. Or, perhaps he has been called upon to make a talk and he remembers that at one time he had just the right material for this talk, or that he listened to someone of experience deliver a talk on this particular subject. These are just two examples of where a good, properly organized set of notes will come in handy.

Below are a few of the many uses you will find for your notes:

- a. As a basis for review
- b. As a basis for organizing a training program
- c. As a basis for acting on certain types of problems
- d. As a basis for review for an examination
- e. As a basis for a series of lectures or other instruction
- f. As a basis for learning policy
- g. As a source book for hard to find facts
- h. As a good device for learning
- i. As a source of material not presented in printed form

What is the best type of notebook to do a good job?

You will be issued several two-inch binders during the program in which to retain your notes and class papers. These are looseleaf binders and you may use whatever method of organization of your material which you desire. The notebooks will be collected and reviewed by the staff on at least one occasion to see if you are keeping your materials in some orderly form. Your material should be tabbed and indexed in some fashion so that you can find material when in need of it. The looseleaf feature makes organization and reorganization easier and the deletion or addition of material quite simple.

What notes should you take?

You know just how much previous knowledge of the subject you possess and you will have to determine for yourself how much of the information is new and desirable to keep in your records for future use. Sometimes the supplemental paper may include almost all of the material you desire. On other occasions you may wish to make quite comprehensive class notes, especially where no paper is offered. There may be times when you will find it sufficient merely to underline thoughts or sentences in the supplemental paper, or to make suitable marginal notes on the paper. On all occasions the instructor will have a thorough working knowledge of the subject and it will be left up to you to record his ideas in whatever form you wish. In determining what notes to take, keep the following factors in mind.

- a. Keep in mind your reasons for taking notes.
- b. Watch for key words or terms around which the main ideas will revolve.
- c. Check carefully everything that is put on the blackboard, magnetic board, or chart paper. Generally, if it is important enough for the instructor to put on the board, it is important enough to include in your notes.
- d. Don't make your notebook a wastebasket for everything!
- e. Watch for special emphasis by the instructor, such as "This is important" or "To sum up the - -", etc.
- f. Watch what other trainees write down. They are fairly good guide posts if you are not certain of the importance of the material.

What is a simple outline form to use?

Note taking is not difficult if certain practical suggestions are followed.

I. Be ready

- A. Have proper notebook, paper, and writing materials
- B. Have it ready on your desk when the speaker begins his discussion

II. Have a heading (This will aid in remembering)

- A. Course or subject heading
- B. Name of instructor and title (This may already be on the supplemental paper)
- C. Date

III. Be alert

- A. Catch the key ideas and high points
- B. Write fast
- C. Stay awake!

IV. Be brief

- A. Use abbreviations where possible
- B. Use your own shortcuts, but be sure that you can interpret them afterwards
- C. Use your own words except for
 - 1. Technical points
 - 2. Definitions
 - 3. Direct statements
- D. Don't crowd your work - paper is cheap
 - 1. So that you can amend or delete
 - 2. To follow easier for later reference
- E. Underline especially important points
- F. Put a question mark after an item you do not fully understand.
 - 1. As to whether you heard correctly
 - 2. To ask questions later
 - 3. To verify later through reference
 - 4. For future reference

V. Be orderly

- A. Numbering or lettering helps to organize
 - 1. Roman numerals - I, II, etc
 - 2. Capital letters - A, B, C, etc.
 - 3. Figures - 1, 2, 3, etc
 - 4. Small letters - a, b, c, etc
 - 5. Figures in brackets - (1), (2), (3), etc.
 - 6. Small letters in brackets - (a), (b), (c), etc
- B. Indent or paragraph to show division
- C. Start a new idea on a new line

VI. Getting the most from your notes

- A. Read over at first opportunity
- B. Fill in abbreviated items
- C. Fill in technical terms & other items
- D. Check for completeness and understandability

VII. Precautions

- A. Never try to write down everything
- B. Don't overcrowd your pages
- C. Don't ask the trainee next to you for information while the discussion leader is talking
- D. Don't make your notes so brief they lose their meaning
- E. Don't forget to underline important points
- F. Don't hesitate to ask questions
- G. Don't repeat notes you have already taken

The method of organization of your notebook will be left entirely up to you. All that is required is that it be organized in such a fashion that the material can be located when you desire it. Index tabs and blue partition sheets are available to assist you in this organization of your notebook. If you need other materials we will try to provide them for you. The ruled paper which will be provided for class notes is 8½" by 11". The mimeographed papers will be on 8" by 10½" paper. This tends to provide a notebook of different sized papers. You may elect to cut down the ruled paper, use unruled paper for classroom notes, or leave it as it is. Unfortunately, GSA does not provide ruled paper in the size 8" by 10½".

From time to time distribution will be made of bulletins, pamphlets, and other printed materials of assorted sizes and thickness. In general, these will not be incorporated in the class notebooks, but should be retained in some organized form so that they can be indexed with materials in the notebooks.