Two-column notes

MAIN IDEAS ON THE LEFT, DETAILS ON THE RIGHT

TOPIC

SOURCE OR CLASS

DATE

MAIN IDEAS · QUESTIONS	NOTES · DETAILS

Two-column notes, even split

LECTURE AND READING, QUOTE AND RESPONSE, QUESTION AND ANSWER

TOPIC

SOURCE OR CLASS

DATE

LEFT	RIGHT

How to take two-column notes

NOTES IN CLASS, CUES AFTER, RECITE FROM THE CUES

1 Set up the page

Topic, source and date at the top. Use page one when one side holds short cues and the other holds the detail; use page two when both sides carry the same weight.

2 Take notes on the right only

During the lecture or the reading, write in the right-hand column and leave the left one empty. Short phrases, your own abbreviations, a line skipped between ideas.

3 Fill the left column afterwards

The same day, read the notes back, fill any gaps, then write a main idea, a key term or a question beside each chunk of notes.

4 Cover and recite

Lay a sheet of paper over the right-hand column. Read each cue on the left, answer aloud in your own words, then slide the sheet down and check. Repeat what you missed.

5 Review briefly, and often

Before each study session on the subject, run the cover-and-recite on your older pages first. A few minutes is enough; the point is to do it every time.

Five ways to label the columns

LEFT COLUMN	RIGHT COLUMN
Main idea	Details and examples
Question	Answer
Key term	Definition, in your own words
Lecture	Reading on the same point
What the text says	What you make of it

The split is the Cornell page without its summary strip. In How to Study in College, Walter Pauk of Cornell University draws a cue column two and a half inches wide on the left, says to keep it empty while you take notes, and adds a two-inch summary area across the foot of each page. If you want that strip, the free Cornell version is at templacity.com/remarkable/cornell-notes-template.