# Cornell Note-Taking System

One of the College Readiness Mathematics Standards is the following student attribute: “Takes responsibility for own learning.” To do that effectively, students must take good notes from lectures, class discussions and readings. But this note-taking skill, and the skill to use those notes effectively, does not come naturally to students – it must be learned.

This handout describes one popular method that turns your notes into a full-fledged study aid. It is called the **Cornell Note-Taking System**. The idea was introduced by Walter Pauk, an education professor at Cornell University in the 1950s who popularized the approach in his best-selling book, *How to Study in College*.

The note-taker first divides the page into four sections, as shown in the figure at right. The top section is used for **Heading** information (usually Course and Date.)

The section labeled **Notes** in the figure is for the actual taking of notes during class or while working on one’s own.

The section labeled **Cue Questions** gets filled in afterward (ideally later the same day). This column should be only about half as wide as the column for **Notes**. The idea is to write questions here that can be answered using the information in the **Notes** column. For example, if the right side of the page contains the definition of the word ‘function’, the left side might have the cue question “Define the word ‘function’.” Or, if the right side has an example of a solved math problem, you could recopy the original problem (not the solution) in the left column as a cue question.

The idea is that, if you cover up the right side of the page, you can use the questions on the left side to test yourself, then you can uncover the right side to check your answers. This allows you to use your notes the same way you would flash cards, except you don’t have to go through all the trouble of writing up separate flash cards. Additionally, the process of writing cue questions is a good way to reinforce what it was that you learned that day and to help you organize the new information in your mind.

Finally, the bottom section of the page is used for a **Summary** of the information on that page. Maybe if the **Notes** section on that page contains examples of how to solve systems of linear equations using the addition method, you could write a sentence or two in the **Summary** to try to describe that method. This is another thing that you would want to fill in after class to reinforce what it was you learned that day. Having these summaries available will also help you later if you need to find a specific topic in your notes.

This method of taking notes and organizing information has proven very useful for students in many subjects, not just mathematics!