

Helping COR101 Students Improve Their Note taking -- Some Suggestions for Classroom Activities

Early in the semester

1. Ask students to bring in notes from a class *they are* currently taking (get them to choose one in which their notes are important or one which is hard for them). If you are in a Learning Community, have the students bring notes from a common class.
2. Check obvious things: do they actually have a notebook for each class or are they keeping notes in folders in which the pages get mixed up?
3. Ask them to discuss the role of notes in the class that they have chosen. How important are they? How do they know? What is their relationship to the text?
4. Ask them to look over their notes and analyze their approach to note taking. Do they have a system (do they write down everything? Have they developed a system of abbreviations and symbols? How do they review their notes? What happens if they miss a class and have no notes? Is it working? What do they need to improve? (You could do this as a general discussion or divide them in small groups and assign each group to come up with a list of suggestions. Or get the whole group to generate a list.)
5. Ask students taking the same class to compare notes. Whose are better? & Why?
6. Find several students who see themselves as good note takers--let them share their strategies with the others. (You could identify these ahead of time let them lead small group discussions of the topic.) You might even suggest that a good note taker go to class with a weak one.
7. Share your own strategies. Think about what you did that worked.
8. After you've done at least one of the above, introduce the Cornell method as one system. (Handouts available in ASAP.) Make them try it out once and discuss the results the next class. You might want to photocopy one student's notes with Cornell for the whole class to look at.
9. Emphasize (again) the relationship between note taking and attending class, staying awake, sitting up front, reading the text, etc.

Return to the topic at least one more time:

1. Discuss note taking after most students have had an exam. Get them to reassess their abilities, get advice from you and others, and possibly try Cornell again.
2. Discuss the problem of the relationship between the text and notes (for some of them a big problem).