

Sports Journalism Skill Module

Taking Notes

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Understand and apply note-taking techniques
- Rely upon note-taking techniques to keep your sports reporting error-free

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

- *You Try It!* Student Worksheet – Taking Notes: Getting It Right!

Additional Online Support:

- www.holtmcdougal.hmhco.com
- www.BlueNoseEd.com

Teach the Skill

1. Introduce Taking Notes: A key skill for the journalist is taking notes. When watching a game, or interviewing a coach or a player, the students may be tempted to think that they will remember all the details. Tell the students that there is, however, no shortcut to accuracy in journalism. In order get things right, they must learn to take notes with speed and accuracy.

2. Teach Taking Notes:

- Tell the students that taking good notes involves three steps:
 1. *Learning to Listen and Observe Closely.* We have all watched hundreds, even thousands, of ballgames. But in order to write a story about a game, students must give their total attention to a game—even to the boring parts!
 2. *Recording Information Clearly and Accurately.* There are many different techniques of notetaking. But none of them will work if a student cannot read his or her own handwriting, or if, in the heat of the moment, he or she writes down information inaccurately.
 3. *Reviewing Notes Regularly.* Tell the students that a key part of notetaking is reviewing one’s notes. Because unclear information can creep into notes, it is important to review one’s notes while the game is still fresh in one’s mind, or the interview subject is still in the same room with you.
- Tell the students that to take good notes, they must have a *method* that they rely upon. To introduce them to a proven method, walk them through the following.

EXAMPLE

The Cornell Method of Note-taking

1. Draw a line on a piece of paper two inches over from the left-hand margin.
2. As you watch a game or conduct an interview, take your main notes on the right hand side of the paper.
3. Each time something important happens, move to the left hand side of the paper, and jot down a **key word**—a name, a play, a time on the game clock. This will help you focus on what has just happened.
4. As you review your notes, pick out more key words from your general notes. This way, when you sit down to write your story, you will already have an idea of what is most important, and what you should highlight in your writing.

- Things in sports happen fast! Tell the students that it is impossible for anyone to write things out in longhand, without missing key events. Because of this, they need to hold to **rules of neatness**,

and develop **their own form of “shorthand.”** To give them an idea of how to do this, go over the following suggestions.

EXAMPLE

| Neatness and “Shorthand”: Keys to Good Note-Taking |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Use a pen, not a pencil.2. Write in phrases, rather than full sentences.3. Skip a line between each note, so you can go back and add fuller information.4. Create order through chronology! Write down the time on the game clock with almost every note you take.5. Create your own “shorthand”:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. use ordinary abbreviations (OK for Oklahoma, TD for touchdown)b. abbreviate other words (uns. or unsportsmanlike, t. for technical)c. use symbols instead of words (@, %, <, >, #, +, -)d. use numbers instead of words (5 instead of five) |

- Note-taking takes practice. To give students feedback on note-taking, do the following exercise in class.

EXAMPLE

| Note-Taking Practice |
|---|
| <p>On TV or video, watch 5-10 minutes of a sporting event—a basketball game, or a tennis match. If you prefer, you can also watch 5-10 minutes of an interview with a figure from the world of sports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• While watching the game, have the students take notes, using the Cornell Method described above.• Turn off the TV, and have the students read aloud verbatim the notes they took.• Have the class members give each other feedback. Were the notes the students took accurate? |

3. Apply the Skill: Hand out copies of the You Try It! Worksheet, “Taking Notes: Getting It Right!” After reading the directions, have the students work through the exercise individually. When they are done, have volunteers report on their work.

QUICK SKILLS CHECK Ask students to tell you the keys to taking good notes, and to describe a method that they use to ensure accuracy in their note-taking.

YOU TRY IT!

Taking Notes: Getting It Right!

GOAL

Sportswriting, like any other form of journalism, depends upon complete accuracy. As you compete in the Blue Nose Sportswriting Contest, nail down your facts with accurate note-taking, and give your writing the authoritative tone that will help it succeed.

Directions: Go to a game being played at your school, or watch a game on television. As you watch the game, use the Cornell Method of note-taking, exemplified below, to help you organize your notes.

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Date: Place: Start Time/End Time: Conditions: Teams: Final Score: | |
| Key Words | Notes |

Self-Check

Review your notes from the game. As you review, reinforce your sense of what was most decisive in the game. Did approaching note-taking in a methodical manner increase your accuracy? Having picked out key words and statistics, do you feel more prepared to write a story about the game you watched?