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**STEVER
ROBBINS:**

Stever Robbins here. Welcome to the Get-It-Done Guys, Quick and Dirty Tips to Work Less and Do More. Today's topic is note-taking in work and school. Jill writes in, "Could you please do a podcast on note-taking tips? I take notes nearly all of my classes, and I'd like some tips on how to make my notes more effective." Jill, taking great notes depends on your circumstances.

The quick and dirty tip is to know how you plan to use your notes and take notes accordingly. You'll do something different whether you're learning or memorizing verses using your notes for action. Notes are the greatest thing since sliced bread. They let you remember things without having to actually remember things. Of course, what to remember depends on your situation.

You, Jill, are a student. You're taking notes to learn, probably while reading a book or hearing a lecture or listening to a podcast. You'll read or hear facts and reasoning. Facts, you jot down if you think you'll need them later. If you hear, the population of Zorbia is 346, just write down, pop Zorbia equals 346. Generally, facts are easy to find in books, so when taking notes, my priority is to listen for reasoning.

Reasoning is when you hear why things happen or how one thing affects another. That's the real meat of learning. When you encounter cause-effect words like why, because, since, or so, you found reasoning. For example, since Zorbia is so small, it has no negotiating power in the United Nations. Bingo. You now know that size is related to negotiating power. And some people say size doesn't matter. Ha!

When listening, don't try to overthink this. Just write down reasons and logic when you hear them. Do the thinking when reviewing. Speaking of size, punt the tiny words like a or the or is to save time. And at least in English, you can often speed right by skipping some vowels. So Zorbia becomes Zrb or Zrba. Also, engage your whole brain with colors, shapes, or pictures, even simple ones. I use a four-color pen and highlight important seeming points in color, or I'll write a big green exclamation point next to reasons so that they stand out.

The very act of taking notes helps you learn even if you don't review them. Check out the mind mapping website of brain expert, Tony Buzan. There's a link in this episode's transcript. In

mind maps, your notes are keywords linked together in a big, beautiful spider web-looking thingy. You can go fast since you only write single words. And later, you color in the map and add symbols. It activates your whole brain and you get to fulfill those childhood Spider-Man fantasies at the same time.

You'll also learn best by relating what you're learning to what you already know. If you have time, jot down the connection to deep, meaningful facts. Population Zorbia equals 346 equals the number of pages in the 1997 hardcover edition of the *Untold Tales of Spider-man* by Stan Lee. Yes! Excuse me. Just remember on the test to answer 346. That's not the time to mention Spider-Man.

For reasoning, find other places where the same reasoning applies. Size equals negotiating power e.g.-- that means for example-- small kid never gets to choose which sports team he's on. Let's not ask why I chose that example. My therapist and I are on it. OK. I sometimes can find reasoning examples while listening, but usually I add those only if I'm taking notes while reading or if they jump out at me or when I'm reviewing. Today's transcript will include some sample notes and a link to Tony's mind mapping website.

Sometimes, you'll take notes that you have to memorize, think test or in the work world, presentation to important client. Here you're making notes from your own material, so you can take some time with it. My greatest success is when I summarize everything on one side of one piece of paper. I started doing this when a sadistic college professor only let us bring a single sheet to the final exam.

And I discovered that after writing the page, it would be burned into my memory. Often I wouldn't even need to pull out the sheet. Keep it to one page and your brain stores it as one memory. To fit as much as possible on the page, get a fine point pen and learn to write small, very small. Once again, size matters.

Remember the filing tips from the episode, *Better Filing?* The same applies here. Group notes on the page according to how you expect to need them. For example, in physics, I would put all the constants like g equals 9.8 meters per second squared in one area. Then I would put the formulas in another place and letter them so I could refer to them in the third place. And the third place would be space for notes on when to use which formula, how to set up certain kinds of problems, et cetera.

Lastly meetings, I love meetings. No, no I don't. I hate meetings. But I take notes in meetings, so later, I can take action. In meetings, you'll find facts, reasoning, and to-do's. We call those action items. I always think of action figurines like GI Joe or Barbie when I hear that term. So listen for the to-do's and write them down. I put a box next to each to do, and I check it off when I've dealt with it. Sometimes, I put to-do's in one area of the page for easy scanning, usually the bottom right-hand corner.

If you're the meeting scribe, and, of course, you listened to *Meeting Madness 2* so you know what I mean, or you don't trust your scribe, you might also note the decisions that get made and the key reasons why or why not. But always record your own to-do's so that you can get going instantly. And I just like drawing, so I mark more than just the to-do's. I use arrows for problems like Doc Octopus stole prototype flying machine from lab, development schedule delayed, and little stars for facts. One of the best things about being grown up is you can give yourself gold stars whenever you want. All these symbols are to help me quickly scan my notes when I'm reviewing them.

Let's recap. How you take notes depends on why you take notes. For learning, it's all about facts and reasoning with reasoning being key. Skip the short words, engage the whole brain, and relate notes to things you know. For recall, get all the info into one mental image. And for action, note the to-do's, decisions, and problems to review.

Don't you just love meetings? I do too, especially when I can participate from my own comfy chair with my co-attendees spread all over the globe. GoToMeeting.com lets you hold meetings remotely over any internet connection. Try it free for 30 days at GoToMeeting.com/podcast.

This is Stever Robbins. If you have a question about How to Work Less and Do More, email getitdone@quickanddirtytips.com or leave voicemail at 866-WRK-LESS. That's W-R-K-L-E-S-S. You can also find a transcript of this episode at getitdone.quickanddirtytips.com along with links to Tony Buzan's website, a copy of a sample sheet of notes, and links to the *Better Filing* episode and *Meeting Madness 2*. Work less, do more. And have a great life.

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