

Take Note

A routine for distilling ideas and identifying emerging questions.

After a lecture, film, reading, or discussion learners “take note” of ONE of the following:

- What is the most important point?
- What are you finding challenging, puzzling or difficult to understand?
- What question would you most like to discuss?
- What is something you found interesting?

Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

This routine can be used to enhance students’ memory of and engagement with ideas by focusing on capturing the heart and distilling key issues and questions after a learning episode rather than in the midst of it. This allows them to participate fully knowing that there are times to consolidate their learning afterwards.

Application: When and where can I use it?

This routine can be used after any episode of learning, whether from a discussion, video, lecture, or reading. The routine may be done at the end of class or at regular intervals (every 10-15 minutes) during the class. It can also be done after an independent reading. Another alternative use is as an “exit ticket” strategy in which students make their note on an index card at the end of class and turn it in to teacher upon exiting the room.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

Explaining the psychology behind this routine can help students learn how to learn. The routine is not simply an activity you are asking to students to do, but a tool designed to help us use our brains more effectively for learning. Explain to students that our learning and memory are enhanced by the regular distillation of key ideas and points as well as our identification of emerging questions and puzzles. Furthermore, the sharing of these ideas and questions supports the group’s learning by facilitating continued exploration, discussion, and synthesis as well as providing the instructor with learning feedback. Encourage learners to engage actively in the learning episode without taking notes so as to be fully present. Some students who are used to spending their time in class may initially resist this call to engage. For these students, it may be useful to share some of the research on note taking and the value of engagement. You might also want to prepare notes in advance yourself, and tell students you will be sharing your notes of key points with them after class but the point now is to engage with the ideas and issues.

At regular intervals (if there is a lot of content) or at the end of the lesson, pass out index cards and ask each student to make note using any one of the above prompts. Have students record their thinking anonymously. This will take approximately 3-5 minutes. Whether done at intervals or at the end, there needs to be some kind of sharing of the notes. This could be done in a number of ways:

1. Have small groups share and discuss what they have written.
2. Have one group collect their index cards and pass them to another group. Upon receiving the new note cards, the cards are randomly distributed and each student reads and responds to the card they receive. Cards are then recollected and passed back to the group from which they came.
3. The teacher collects all note cards and redistributes them randomly. Students then read aloud the note card they receive. The teacher may document and organize the responses.
4. If using the exit ticket method, the teacher collects, reads, and summarizes the Take-Note cards as a form of formative assessment and begins the next class by sharing or in some way making use of what was shared.

Share your experience with this thinking routine on social media using the hashtags #PZThinkingRoutines and #TakeNote.