



PREPS: 5 steps for electronic notetaking success

By [Vicki Davis](#) on June 20th, 2014



Students everywhere are taking pictures of the board. It is almost like a “get out of jail free” card when it comes to taking notes. Can they find them later? Do they ever look at them again? Do they review them for the test? Obviously, we need new note-taking systems to help students learn, recall and capture in this modern age.

In light of the unique nature of electronic notetaking, I’ve developed a system that I share in my new book “**Reinventing Writing**” that I call PREPS. In my opinion, there are two contenders for best notebook service: **Evernote** and **One Note**. I’ll mention them throughout this guide.

1. PREPARE

Set up

Prepare your notebook by setting up categories and notebooks. Plan ahead for a class or meeting by using a template in **Kustom Note** for Evernote or use one of the templates included with One Note. If you need help organizing, watch **the Evernote Secret Weapon** videos.

Front load learning

Read and take notes before class. I use the **SQ3R method** to review textbooks or other course material as I jot notes in my notebook. Few people realize that you can export your notes out of ebooks and pull them into your electronic notebook. (See instructions for **Kindle** and **iBook**.)

In-class preparation

Learning starts before class. Once the teacher gives handouts, go ahead and put the

bullet points on your document, or take a picture of the handout so you can write on it using **Skitch** or **Adobe Acrobat Pro**. When you're done, you can copy it directly into your notebook.

Automate

You can also automate certain things so your notebook can be your virtual assistant. Here are a few examples:

- Older students can use **ifttt.com** to take all of the tweets to your course hashtag and put them in an Evernote or One Note notebook automatically.
- You can use the Evernote or One Note clipping tool to mark up webpages.
- You can save online reading assignments to your notebook directly or by linking your **Diigo** bookmarks or **Pocket** articles to your notebook with ifttt.com.

2. RECORD

Students should be fluent in transliterate notetaking which means they can use text, audio or video fluently. In other words, transliterate students are literate in all of the methods of capturing notes.

It is challenging to record video and take notes in most apps, so I suggest students use video on one device and take notes on the other. The key point here is that students should be actively engaged in notetaking. If you say, "I'll listen now and go back and listen and take notes later" that is a mistake for all but the strongest auditory learners who need to be making eye contact. I've found that many auditory learners do well with a **Livescribe pen** which can sync to your notebook over Wi-Fi. Certainly, you can still use paper. If you take notes on paper, scan them to your notebook after class or snap a picture. They are now searchable.

3. ENGAGE

My favorite professor at Georgia Tech, Dr. Adler, taught us the "Information Conversion Process." He said that to convert information to knowledge, you have to engage with what you're learning. Engaging with your notes and course content can take many different forms. For me it was rewriting and reorganizing my notes, but electronic notebooks open the doorway to many more study helpers than pen and paper.

Here are a few examples of how to engage with your notes:

- Use **Study Blue**, **Evernote Peek** or **Everword** to pull vocabulary out of your notebook for study.
- Use One Note to automatically extract vocabulary or important points into a separate document for review.
- Share notes with classmates or combine notes with partners simultaneously in a One Note shared notebook or by using **Live Minutes** with Evernote.

4. PONDER

Create a master overview of what you're learning.

As individuals, we need to link our textbook, our videos and everything together. I prefer to do this by creating one master notebook page for a semester. You can link to the other notes with a simple hyperlink and let the major concepts be on one page. For example, if you're studying covalent bonding, you could list that as a concept on your master page and link to the class notes on covalent bonding that are on another notebook page.

Plan to ponder.

If you're a student, put a weekly appointment on your schedule to ponder and reflect. During this time, update master overview notebook page of what you're learning.

Capturing is not enough, you must relate your class time, reading, and discussions together so you can understand and engage with what you're learning and that takes time.

5. SYNC

The best notebooks are with you everywhere you go on every device. Get in the habit of pressing sync the moment you finish taking notes. Without syncing you can't get to thinking.

Notetaking is just one of the nine ways writing has been reinvented but it is one of the most important. Notes are a personalized way for students to learn. We all need systems and routines to engage with the content. PREPS is one way to do that.

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