Guided Notes: Helping All Students Succeed in the General Education Curriculum

Traditional lecture is widely used in middle and high school classes. Most successful students take notes during lectures and study them later. Note taking serves two functions: a process function (the note taker interacts with the curriculum content during the lecture by listening, looking, thinking, and writing) and a product function (the note taker produces a summary/list of key points for later study) (Boyle, 2001).

Many students with learning disabilities lack the complex set of skills necessary for effective note taking. Effective note taking requires the ability to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant content and facts, attend to teachers' "verbal signposts," organize information, and record information accurately and fluently (Boyle, 2010; Kiewra, 2002). These skills are noticeably lacking in the repertoires of many students without disabilities as well.

WHAT ARE GUIDED NOTES?
Guided notes (GNs) are teacher-prepared handouts that "guide" a student through a lecture with standard cues and specific space in which to write key facts, concepts, and/or relationships. Guided notes help students succeed with both functions of note taking. With regard to the process function, GNs take advantage of one of the most consistent and important findings in recent educational research: students who make frequent, relevant responses during a lesson learn more than students who are passive observers. To complete their GNs, students must respond throughout the lecture by listening, looking, thinking, and writing about the lesson's content. Guided notes assist students with the product function of note taking because they are designed so that all students can produce a standard and accurate set of lecture notes for study and review (see Figure A).

Numerous studies have found that students at all achievement levels in elementary through postsecondary classrooms perform better on tests of retention of lecture content when they used GNs than on tests based on lectures when they took their own notes (e.g., Hamilton, Seibert, Gardner, & Talbert-Johnson, 2000; Konrad, Joseph, & Eveleigh, 2009; Musti-Rao, Stephen, Kroeger, & Schumacher-Dyke, 2008; Patterson, 2005; Sweeney et al., 1999).

Other Advantages of Guided Notes
In addition to requiring students to actively respond to curriculum, helping them produce an accurate set of notes, and improving retention of course content, other advantages of GNs include the following (Heward, 2001):

- Students can easily identify the most important information. Because GNs cue the location and number of key concepts, facts, and/or relationships, students can better determine if they are "getting it" and are more likely to ask the teacher to clarify. Teachers often report that students ask more content-specific questions during lectures when GNs are used.
- Teachers must prepare the lesson or lecture carefully.
- Teachers are more likely to stay on task with the lecture's content and sequence. Teachers, especially those who are most knowledgeable and interested in their subject matter, sometimes get sidetracked from main points students need to know. While these tangential points may be interesting, they make it difficult for even skilled note takers to determine what's most important in a lecture/demonstration.
- GNs can improve students' independent note-taking skills. Gradually fading the use of GNs can help students learn to take notes in classes in which GNs are not used. For example, after several weeks of providing students with GNs for the entire lecture, the teacher might give GNs for only three quarters of the lecture, then one half of the lecture, and so on.

HOW TO GET STARTED
Here are steps and suggestions for creating and using GNs:

1. Examine existing lecture outlines to identify the most important course content that students must learn and retain via lectures. Remember: less can be more. Student learning is enhanced by lectures with fewer points supported by additional examples and opportunities for students to respond to questions or scenarios.

2. Include all facts, concepts, and relationships students are expected to learn on guided notes.

3. Include background information so that students' note taking focuses on the important facts, concepts, and relationships they need to learn.

4. Delete the key facts, concepts, and relationships from the lecture outline, leaving the remaining information to provide structure and context for students' note taking.

5. Insert cues such as asterisks, bullets, and blank lines to show students where, when, and how many facts or concepts to write and provide students with a legend that explains each symbol. (See Figure B on p. 186 for an example.)

6. Leave ample space for students to write. Providing three to four times the space needed to
GUIDED NOTES FOR A LESSON ON CLOUDS COMPLETED
BY AN ELEMENTARY STUDENT WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Clouds
Directions: Follow along with your teacher and fill in your guided notes.

What Are Clouds?
* Clouds are tiny drops of condensing Water vapor or Ice crystals that settle on particles of dust in the atmosphere.

What Are the Different Kinds of Clouds?
* Although there are many different types of clouds, there are three main types:
  - Cirrus
  - Cumulus
  - Stratus

How Do I Know What Type of Clouds Are in the Sky?
* Cirrus clouds
  - Most common
  - Usually made of Ice crystals
  - Look like feathers
  - Thin and Wispy

  Draw a picture of a cirrus cloud.

* Cumulus clouds
  - White and Puffy
  - Look like cotton balls
  - Usually predict Fair weather but can develop into Cumulonimbus clouds which may produce rain, lightning strong winds, and hail

  Draw a picture of a cumulus cloud.

Source: Courtesy of Moira Konrad, The Ohio State University.
**Explanation of Symbols in Guided Notes**

- **☆, †, ○**: Write a definition, concept, key point, or procedure next to each bullet, asterisk, star, or numbered circle.
- **__________**: Fill in blank lines with a word or phrase to complete a definition, concept, key point, or procedure during lecture/class.
- **→**: The pointing finger comes into play when you review and study your notes after class. It is a prompt to think of and write your own examples of a concept or ideas for applying a particular strategy.
- **Big idea**: Big ideas are statements or concepts with wide-ranging implications for understanding and/or applying course content.

For more details on these and additional suggestions for developing and using guided notes, see Heward (2001); Konrad, Joseph, and Itoi (2011); and Lazarus (1996).

9. **Use PowerPoint slides or other visuals to project key content.** Visually projecting the key facts, definitions, concepts, and relationships enhances student access to the most critical content and improves the pace of the lecture.

10. **Intersperse opportunities for other forms of active student response during lesson.** Stop lecturing from time to time, and ask a series of questions, to which the students respond chorally or with response cards (see Chapter 2), referring to their GNs for answers as needed.

11. **Consider gradually fading the use of guided notes to help students learn to take notes in classes in which they are not used.**

12. **Provide follow-up activities to ensure that students study and review their notes, such as daily quizzes, collaborative review activity, and random study checks.**
References for
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1 From *Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education* (10th ed.) (pp. 184-186) by William L. Heward. © 2013, Pearson Education.