



### Guided Notes

IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR LECTURES

Developed by William L. Heward

The Ohio State University Partnership Grant

Improving the Quality of Education for Students with Disabilities

#### What are Guided Notes?

Guided notes are instructor-prepared handouts that provide students with background information and standard cues with specific spaces to write key facts, concepts, and/or relationships during the lecture. {See example on page 5} Guided notes (GN) require students to actively respond during the lecture, improve the accuracy and efficiency of students' note taking, and increase students' retention of course content. GN can help organize and enhance lecture content in any discipline or subject area. Instructors can develop GN for a single lecture, for one or more units within a course, or for an entire semester-long course.

#### Why Use Guided Notes?

Guided notes offer benefits for students and instructors:

- **Students produce complete and accurate lecture notes.** Students who take accurate notes and study them later consistently receive higher test scores than students who only listen to the lecture and read the text (Baker & Lombardi, 1985; Carrier, 1983; Kierwa, 1987; Norton & Hartley, 1986). Inaccurate and incomplete lecture notes are of limited value for subsequent study. GN can help level the playing field between students with and without good notetaking skills.

Guided notes take advantage of one of the most consistent and important findings in recent educational research: *students who make frequent, lesson-relevant responses learn more than students who are passive observers.*

- **Students' active engagement with course content increases.** To complete their GN, students must actively respond to the lecture's content by listening, looking, thinking, and writing.

"Guided notes are wonderful, especially during a lecture. They clue you in on what is important." - College student with learning disabilities.

- **Students can more easily identify the most important information.** Because GN cue the location and number of key concepts, facts, and/or relationships, students are better able to determine if they are getting the most important content.

- **Students are more likely to ask the instructor questions.** Austin, Gilbert, Thibeault, Carr, and Bailey (in press) found that during lectures when GN were used, students in an introductory psychology course asked more questions and made more comments than they did during lectures when taking their own notes.
- **Students earn higher quiz and exam scores.** Experimental studies have consistently found that students across all achievement and age/grade levels earn higher test scores when using guided notes than they earn when taking their own notes (Austin et al., in press; Heward, 1994; Lazarus, 1993)
- **Instructors must prepare lecture carefully.** Constructing GN requires instructors to examine the sequence and organization of lecture content.
- **Instructors are more likely to stay on-task with the lecture’s content and sequence.** Because GN let students know what is supposed to come next, instructors are less likely to stray very far from the planned content. If and when an instructor does wander, the instructor and students know the information is, at most, supporting context or enrichment, and not critical course content for which the students will be held responsible.
- **GN help instructors prioritize and limit lecture content.** Many instructors try to pack their lectures with much too much information. While this tendency is understandable—instructors want their students to learn as much as possible—when it comes to how much new lecture content students can learn and retain, less can be more (Nelson, 2001; Russell, Hendricson, & Herbert, 1984). Constructing GN requires decisions about what is really important, what the key concepts are that the instructors want their students to learn.
- *GN content can easily be converted into test/exam questions.*
- **Students like GN and appreciate instructors who prepare them.** Students appreciate and give positive evaluation ratings to instructors who develop and provide GN.

“Last semester I developed guided notes for my two lecture-based courses, and the feedback I received from students was very positive. Several of my colleagues told me students in their classes asked if they would use guided notes, too.”  
 - Faculty member in education department.

## Two FAQs About Guided Notes

**Q:** Isn’t providing students – especially college students – with guided notes making it too easy for them? Are we just “spoon-feeding them with information?”

**A:** To complete their guided notes, students must actively respond – by looking, listening, thinking, and writing about the critical content – throughout the lecture. We make it too easy for students when we teach in ways that let them sit passively during class.

**Q:** Why not just pass out an outline of my lecture copy of the guided notes already completed?

**A:** Distributing completed guided notes reduces the necessity for students to think and respond during class, or even to attend class at all.

## Guidelines for Constructing and Using Guided Notes

Constructing an initial set of GN is easy; especially for lectures that have been developed previously.

- **Examine your existing lecture outlines (or create one them necessary) to identify the most important course content that students must learn and retain via lecture.** 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 (Russell et al., 1984).
- **Delete the key facts, concepts, and relationships from the lecture outline, leaving the remaining information to provide structure and context for students' note taking.**
- **Insert formatting cues such as asterisks, lines, bullets to show students where, when, and how many facts or concepts to write.** For example, the box below might be included on the first page of GN.

Explanation of Symbols in Guided Notes	
• * ★ ①	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.

- **Use PowerPoint slides or overhead transparencies to project key content.** Visually projecting the key facts, definitions, concepts, relationships, etc. that students must write in their GN helps ensure that all students access the most critical content and improves the pace of the lecture.
- **Leave ample space for students to write.** Providing about three to four times the space needed to type the content will generally leave enough room for students' handwriting.
- **Do not require students to write too much.** Using GN should not unduly slow down the pace of the lecture. Two studies found that students' exam scores for lectures taught with GN that could be completed by writing single words and short phrases were as high as their scores on tests over lecture taught with GN that required more extensive writing to complete (Austin & Sasson, 2001; Courson, 1989).
- **Enhance GN with supporting information, resources, and additional response opportunities.** Consider inserting diagrams, illustrations, photos, highlighted statements or concepts that are particularly important (e.g., Big Ideas), and resources such as bibliographies and websites into GN. Sets of questions or practice problems interspersed within the GN give students additional opportunities to respond and receive instructor feedback during the lecture.
- **Make GN available to students via course website and/or photocopied course packets.** Many instructors are understandably concerned that making their lecture notes available prior to class will reduce attendance because students will assume the notes contain all the information they need. However, distributing GN before class may give students an incentive to attend class in order to complete the notes.

## Example of Guided Notes

### II. FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PROMOTING GENERALIZED OUTCOMES

1. ***Eliminate the need for*** generality as much as possible.

A. ***Prioritize the settings*** in which the learner will most often function.

In addition to the learner's current environment(s), consider the • ***environments in which the learner will function in the immediate future, and later in life.***

B. ***Prioritize the knowledge and skills*** that will frequently be required of the learner.

Why? Because you • ***cannot teach everything (or even every aspect of any one skill).***

The most important skill-setting combinations should ***always be taught directly.***

Don't relegate the most critical outcomes to the not-for-certain technology of generalization programming.

2. ***Probe for*** generalized outcomes ***before, during, and after instruction.***

A. A generalization probe is • ***a direct and objective assessment of the learner's use of the target skill in a non-training setting or situation.***

EX: We can assess the extent to which a student has generalized the skill of solving two-digit minus two-digit arithmetic problems with regrouping by presenting her with problems of the same type on which she has not received any instruction or guided practice.

▀ *student writes another example here when reviewing notes after class*

B. Generalization probes can often be made more efficient by • ***contriving meaningful opportunities for the learner to use her new knowledge or skill.***

EX: Instead of waiting for (and perhaps missing) naturally occurring opportunities for the Learner to use her new conversational skills in the generality environment, enlist the assistance of a "confederate" peer to approach the learner.

▀ *student writes another example here when reviewing notes after class*

C. Probing for generalization before instruction provides 3 important kinds of information.

1. Probes prior to teaching might reveal that the learner • ***already performs some or all of the components of the target skill in the generality setting, thereby lessening the teaching ta***
2. Probes prior to teaching are the only objective way to know if learner's performance of the target knowledge/skill • ***after instruction truly is a G.O.***
3. Probes prior to teaching ☐ • ***enable observation of the contingencies operating in the generality setting.***

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## About the Author

William L. Heward is Professor of Special Education, School of Physical Activity and Educational Services, The Ohio State University. His current research interests include "low tech" methods classroom teachers can use during group instruction to increase student participation and achievement. Heward has collaborated on more than a dozen classroom studies evaluating guided notes, and he uses guided notes in all of his lecture-based courses. He received OSU's Distinguished Teaching Award in 1985.

**Important Note**

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