How to Take Notes from Textbooks

Why Take Notes From the Textbook?

- Many professors will take exam material from the textbook (and you can ask ahead of time!)
- Many professors will rely on the textbook to either reinforce what they have taught, or to teach you topics they do not have time to cover in class
- It reinforces your knowledge of what you have learned in class
- The textbook may explain concepts in an easier way than in class

You Will Need…

- Your textbook (and be willing to highlight it, or make photocopies and use those)
- Highlighters
- Pens/pencils
- Sticky note flags

Let’s Get Started!

- Colour coordination:
  - Use purple for titles and important keywords
  - Use orange for any definitions
  - Use green for practical examples that explain the material
  - Use yellow for important information
- Always reference the chapter number and pages of what you are studying at the top of the page; you may choose to create a fancier title using decorations!
- Go through the textbook chapter and find each of the titles. These will be your headings for your notes; highlight these in purple
- As you are doing this, use the sticky note flags to mark titles that seem confusing or are new information for you
- Mark any summary charts, tables, diagrams or graphs with sticky flags
- As you are going along, make sure to write down page numbers in your class notes for cross-referencing
  - For example, if you are studying the cycles of sleep and you come across a diagram that clearly explains these cycles in your textbook, write down the page number in your class notes for later reference when studying
- Make sure your notes follow a logical order – for example, study the sections from the chapter in order, or study the chapters from the textbook in the same order as the material is being taught in class
Avoid writing word for word from the textbook – try reading a full page before you write your own notes (in your own words)! You often will remember the most important information from that passage.

Highlight only major, key points; summarize these concepts with bullet points.

Use symbols to make sentences stand out, such as an exclamation point.

Summarize paragraphs on sticky notes, and place them in your textbook; this way, when you return to study, the information is already summarized.

Don’t write information twice – if you already have it in your lecture notes, don’t waste time taking it down from the textbook.

Usually, the end of your textbook will have chapter summaries and maybe some practice/study questions – incorporate these into your studies so that you can test your understanding.

It may be beneficial to start a given study session with the material that you find most difficult to understand (and, ideally, right after the class in which this information was taught).

Happy studying!