Options to embed notetaking support within a course

In 2018 – 2019, 93% of the 3,499 learners provided accommodations by the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) required support for notetaking or other means of capturing the content of lecture-based instruction. This is the number of learners who chose to register with CAL for a letter of accommodation (LOA). It does not take into account those learners who are unaware of the challenges the post-secondary classroom may present.

In order to accommodate all learners proactively, some options to embed notetaking support within a course are provided in this document. The options outlined here are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Instructors are encouraged to embrace learner variability in their decision-making and to function within the mindset of "necessary for some; good for all." Positive changes to the learning environment should be made available to all learners to keep flexibility at the forefront of our learner-driven activities.

I. Provide a template for notetaking

One option to support notetaking in a course would be to provide all learners with either a physical or digital template for taking notes.

The template could be tailored to the course material or it could be a more standard notetaking approach, such as the Cornell method or the SQ3R method for taking notes from reading material.

II. Ensure that tools or notes are provided in advance

In order to support our learners effectively with their variability in notetaking skills, it is important to ensure that tools or notes are provided in advance.

For many learners, developing a familiarity in advance with tools they will be expected to use in class as well as notes that will be reviewed unlocks their potential because they are able to engage with the content more fully. This practice can also lead to better classroom discussions as a result of the opportunity to prepare.

III. Include a lesson or module on notetaking in the course

Whether it is a full class, part of a class, a visit from one of the Centre for Accessible Learning's (CAL) Learning Strategists, or material posted online, signalling the importance of notetaking to your learners is one way to get everyone involved in the discussion.

If the skill of notetaking is going to be an important part of demonstrating the learning goals for a course, it is best to support learners in the development of the skill.

IV. Embed notetaking and notetakers in the course as part of the evaluation

In order to embrace the variability of learners, notetaking and notetakers could be embedded in the course as part of the evaluation. Whether it is for participation marks or an assignment, learners can take turns taking notes during a class and making those notes available to the rest of the class.

Numerous tools such as the discussion board in a learning management system (LMS), OneNote, or Google Docs could be used to facilitate both the notetaking as well as the sharing of the notes with the other learners in the course. If more control is desired, then the notes can be e-mailed to the instructor for posting in a content section of the LMS.

For more information on OneNote, included in Algonquin's Office 365 suite, visit [the Microsoft Office Support page with OneNote video training](#).

V. Allow recording of the class

While this option may not be a good fit for all instructors or all courses, allowing learners to record class is an option for providing notetaking support. Learners would have access to the recording to review and supplement notes outside of class time.

Whether it is audio or video recording clear rules need to be set and discussed with learners at the start of the course.

Where possible, the use of technology, such as Zoom or other videoconferencing tools could benefit all learners. Until classrooms are more robustly outfitted with audio and video recording tools, a collaboration between instructors and learners that respects the College's core values will be the best approach.

VI. Adopt a program-level strategy for notetaking

If notetaking is a valuable employability skill for learners that aligns with the learning goals for the program, think about adopting a program-level strategy for notetaking so that learners are experiencing notetaking as a transferrable skill across courses.

With multiple instructors sharing their knowledge and expertise, learners can better embrace their own variability without feeling like they are required to follow a set format for notetaking. Increasing the linkages and connections between courses could encourage learners to find other content-related connections between courses.

VII.   Incorporate the use of test notes or cheat sheets in the evaluation of tests and exams.

Where appropriate, the value of notetaking could be supported by incorporating the use of test notes or cheat sheets in the evaluation of tests and exams. Within parameters laid out by the instructor, learners would be able to prepare notes that could be used during a test or exam. Upon completion of the assessment, learners would submit the notes for review.

With tests and exams being such a high-stakes assessment, learners are likely to benefit from the preparation of the notes as an exercise in consolidating their knowledge. In addition, the notes could be submitted in advance of the test or exam and the top two or three sets of notes could be shared with the entire class prior to the assessment as a further means of accounting for learner variability.