

TAKE NOTE

Purpose: Students need to develop quick and efficient note-taking strategies, which are needed in the Listening, Speaking, and Writing sections on the TOEFL® iBT test. One important note-taking strategy is to use symbols and abbreviations. These exercises provide a creative introduction to and practice with note-taking skills using symbols and abbreviations.

Organization: Whole class (Variations 1) or small groups (Variation 2 & 3)

Preparation: Short dictations

Time: 20-30 minutes

Procedure:

Variation 1 - Short and Sweet

1. Introduce students to standard and creative abbreviations and symbols that can be used in note taking.
2. As a group, generate a list of common words and phrases that can be abbreviated. Here are some ideas. Feel free to change them and add your own.

Word or Phrase	Abbreviation
with	w/
without	w/o
should be	s/b
because	bec
for example	ex. / e.g.
that is	i.e.
etcetera	etc.
continued	cont'd
between	bet
people	peop
population	pop
experience	exp
American	Amer
possible	poss
small	sm
large	lg

also known as	AKA
as soon as possible	ASAP
to be continued	TBC
first, second, third, fourth ...	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th ...
and	&
is, equals	=
more than / less than	> / <
at	@

3. Explain to students that they're going to do a dictation but with the following rules:
 - Use symbols and abbreviations from the list or ones that you make up.
 - Do not write any complete words.
 - Do not use articles

Note: Of course, we don't normally use *only* abbreviations and symbols for note taking, but this exercise pushes reluctant students to develop their own useful shorthand.

4. Give the dictation to students. Say each sentence once or twice at normal speaking speed.
5. After the dictation, students should reconstruct the complete dictation, using their abbreviated notes.
6. Correct by either putting the dictation on the board or having students write it on the board.
7. Have students share their abbreviations with each other in small groups.

Variation 2 - The Real Deal

1. After you think that your students have the idea, you can teach them to use symbols and abbreviations for function words and repeated words (write the word the first time and put the abbreviation in parentheses after).

2. Choose a listening selection from your textbook or a practice test and play it. Have students listen for repeating content words.
3. Make a list of key repeating words and possible abbreviations on the board.
4. Review a list of common function words and their abbreviation (see Variation 1, Step 2).
5. Listen to the selection again and have students take notes using the abbreviations you've discussed. (Repeat, if necessary.)
6. Have students compare their notes in small groups and discuss which abbreviations worked well for them and which ones didn't.

Variation 3 - Write a Letter to a Friend

1. Put students in pairs. (They don't have to be sitting next to each other.)
2. Follow steps 1 and 2 from Variation 1, but instead of having students listen to a dictation, have them write a letter to their partner. The letter could be an opinion or a description of a problem. This activity could follow up on class readings or discussions or any part of the TOEFL iBT test in which students must give an opinion.
3. Students write their letters using symbols and abbreviations.
4. Students exchange letters with partner.
5. Students try to decipher and rewrite their partner's letter, but this time using complete words.
6. Partners get together and check the results.
7. As a whole class, add any new, useful abbreviations and/or symbols to the list.

Variation 4 - Parts of Speech Jigsaw

1. Divide class in half. Instruct Group A to take notes during the dictation, using only nouns. Group B takes notes, using only verbs.
2. Give dictation as suggested in Step 3 of Variation 1.
3. Put students in groups of 4, with 2 students from Group A and 2 students from Group B.
4. Have students reconstruct the dictation, using complete sentences.
5. Have a couple of groups put their reconstructed dictations on the board and compare to the original dictation.