MVIII SELF · WORKBOOK 01

NOTES

How lawyers, doctors and writers take notes

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What notes are for

Note-taking

> **In five minutes.** After your next class or meeting, close your notes and write the three main points in your own words. Then open the notes and mark what you missed.

THE METHOD

1. Before you start, decide which job this page has to do: help you understand now, keep a record for later, or both.
2. Write the main ideas in your own words.
3. Copy word for word only what has to stay exact: definitions, numbers, formulas, names and quotes.
4. Skip a line between ideas, so there is room to add to the page later.
5. Within a day, read the page once and fill the gaps while the memory is fresh.
6. Put the date and a one-line label at the top, so the page can be found again.

REMEMBER

- **Notes do two jobs: taking the idea in as you write, and keeping a record for later.**
- **Main ideas in your own words.**
- **Exact words only for definitions, numbers, formulas, names and quotes.**
- **Skip a line between ideas. Date and label every page.**
- **Read it once within a day and fill the gaps.**

TRY IT · 20 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Take notes on one lecture or a 15-minute recorded talk. For the first half, write as close to word for word as you can. For the second half, write only in your own words, a line per idea. The next day, without looking, write what you remember from each half. Then check both against the notes and see which half you can still explain.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

In your next meeting, write no more than five lines. Each line is one thing that was decided or asked, in your own words. Afterward, compare your five lines with the recording, the minutes, or a colleague's full notes. Write down what your five lines missed, and what the full record buried.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON The first paragraph of chapter 1 of the Enchiridion, noted twice: once as close to word for word as the pen could keep up, once in my own words

WORD FOR WORD

- Of things some are in our power, and others are not. In our power are opinion, movement towards a thing, desire, aversion...
- (lost the list here)
- Not in our power are the body, property, reputation, offices...
- the things in our power are by nature free... the things not in our power are weak, slavish...
- you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, you will blame both gods and men

IN MY OWN WORDS

- Two kinds of things. Mine to control: my opinions, my wants, what I move toward or away from. My own acts.
- Not mine: body, property, reputation, job titles.
- Mine is free. Not mine depends on other people.
- Treat what's theirs as mine and I end up frustrated and blaming everyone.
- Treat only mine as mine and no one can force or block me.
- Keep exact: "Of things some are in our power, and others are not."

A DAY LATER, FROM MEMORY

- Word-for-word half: remembered "in our power" and "hindered, lament". Could not say what the middle list was for.
- Own-words half: could give the two kinds, the cost of mixing them up, and the payoff. Forgot reputation was on the not-mine list.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. What are the two jobs notes do?
2. Why write main ideas in your own words, and copy only some things exactly?
3. What does the pen-or-laptop research show?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

A lined page

The Cornell page

Cornell notes

> **In five minutes.** Tonight, take one page of notes you already have. Draw a line down the left side and write a question beside each main idea. Then cover the right side and answer them.

THE METHOD

1. Draw a vertical line about 2.5 inches from the left edge and a horizontal line about 2 inches from the bottom. Write the date and topic at the top.
2. Record. During the lecture or meeting, write only in the wide right column. Short phrases, your own words, a skipped line between ideas.
3. Question. Within a day, read the notes and write a question or cue word in the left column beside each main idea.
4. Recite. Cover the right column. Answer each question from memory, aloud or on scrap paper, then uncover it and check.
5. Summarize. In the bottom strip, write two or three sentences on what the page says and why it matters.
6. Review. Once a week, cover the notes on every page so far and run through the questions.

REMEMBER

- **Rule the page: notes on the right, a 2.5-inch cue column on the left, a 2-inch summary strip at the bottom.**
- **During class or the meeting, write only in the notes column.**
- **Within a day, add a question beside each main idea.**
- **Cover the notes and answer the questions from memory.**
- **Sum up the page in two or three sentences at the bottom. Review every page weekly.**

TRY IT · 30 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Rule one page as a Cornell page before your next lecture or textbook section. Take notes in the right column for the whole session. That evening, spend 10 minutes writing questions in the left column and 5 minutes on a three-sentence summary. Two days later, cover the notes and answer your own questions. Mark each one you missed.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

Use a Cornell page for one training session, client call or long podcast episode. Take notes on the right while you listen. Afterward, write in the left column the questions a teammate might ask you about it. Write the summary as the message you would send them. A week later, answer the questions cold before you reread anything.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON Chapter 1 of the Enchiridion, about 400 words, read as a textbook section

CUE QUESTIONS	NOTES
• What two kinds of things does Epictetus separate? • What is in our power, and why does he call it free? • What happens if you treat what is not yours as your own? • Why can't you chase great things and wealth and office at once? • What do you say to a harsh appearance, and what is the first test?	• Two kinds: in our power, not in our power. • In our power: opinion, impulse ("movement towards a thing"), desire, aversion. "Whatever are our acts." • Not in our power: body, property, reputation, offices. Whatever is not our own act. • Ours = free, can't be restrained. Not ours = weak, "slavish", in others' power. • Mix them up: hindered, lament, disturbed, blame gods and men. • Keep them straight: no one compels you or harms you. No enemy. • Great aims take more than a small effort. Leave some things alone, put others off. • Chase power and wealth too: may miss those, will miss freedom and happiness. • Practice: say to a harsh appearance, "You are an appearance, and in no manner what you appear to be." Test: in our power or not? If not, "it does not concern you."

SUMMARY

- Epictetus splits everything into our own acts and everything else. Distress comes from treating the second kind as the first. The daily practice: stop at each harsh impression, ask which kind it is, and let go of what is not ours.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. Why leave the cue column empty during the lecture?
2. Why cover the notes and answer the questions instead of rereading?
3. What makes a good cue question?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

NOTES · LESSON 02 · PRACTICE

A Cornell page

CUE QUESTIONS

NOTES

SUMMARY, IN YOUR OWN WORDS

NOTES · LESSON 03

Brief it, then outline it

Case brief and course outline

> **In five minutes.** Take one long email thread from this week. On a card, write four lines: what happened, the open question as yes or no, what was decided, and why.

THE METHOD

1. Read the whole case once without writing. Then put the case name, court and year at the top of a page.
2. Facts. In three or four lines, what happened between the parties. Keep only the facts the court relied on.
3. Procedural history. Who sued whom, what the lower courts decided, and who appealed.
4. Issue. The legal question the court answered, written as a yes-or-no question.
5. Holding and rule. The court's answer in one sentence, and the rule it applied in another.
6. Reasoning. Why the court decided as it did, in three to five lines. Add any dissent in one line.
7. Outline. At the end of each unit, merge your briefs and lecture notes under topic headings. Keep each rule and one case that shows it. Cut the rest.

REMEMBER

- **Brief one case per page: facts, history, issue, holding and rule, reasoning.**
- **Write the issue as a yes-or-no question.**
- **Keep only the facts the result depended on.**
- **At the end of each unit, merge the briefs into the outline.**
- **Outline: topic, rule, one case that shows it. Cut the rest.**

TRY IT · 40 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Pick one case from a casebook, or any long textbook example with a problem and a resolution. Brief it on one page in 20 minutes using the six headings. Then take the briefs from one unit and write a one-page outline: topic headings, the rule under each, one case per rule. Whatever does not fit on the page gets cut.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

Brief a long email thread, a contract or a meeting. Facts: what happened. History: what has already been tried or decided. Issue: the open question, as yes or no. Holding: what was decided, or what you recommend. Reasoning: why, in three lines. At the end of a month, merge the briefs into a one-page outline of the project.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON Hadley v. Baxendale, Court of Exchequer, 1854, a leading English case on damages for breach of contract, from the report in volume 9 of the Exchequer Reports, pages 341 to 356

NAME AND DATE

- Hadley v. Baxendale, 9 Exch. 341. Court of Exchequer, February 1854. Judgment by Alderson, B.

FACTS: WHAT HAPPENED

- Hadley and a partner run the City Steam-Mills in Gloucester. The crank shaft of the steam engine breaks and the mill stops.
- Joyce & Co. of Greenwich will make a new shaft but need the broken one as a pattern.
- Hadley's servant takes it to Pickford & Co., carriers (Baxendale and others). Pays £2 4s. Told: in by noon, delivered next day.
- Delivery delayed by neglect. Mill idle several extra days. Hadley sues for lost profits.
- So far: carrier paid £25 into court. Jury gave £25 more. Carrier asks for a new trial: damages too remote.

QUESTION: WHAT HAD TO BE DECIDED

- Does a carrier who delivers late owe the sender's lost profits, when nothing told the carrier the profits hung on the delivery?

RULE: WHAT DECIDED IT

- Damages are those "arising naturally, i.e., according to the usual course of things, from such breach of contract itself, or such as may reasonably be supposed to have been in the contemplation of both parties, at the time they made the contract, as the probable result of the breach of it."

REASONING: WHY

- All the carrier knew: a broken mill shaft, sent by millers.
- Most millers sending a shaft away would lose nothing from a delay. They might have a spare, or the mill might be down for other reasons.
- The special circumstances were "never communicated" to the carrier.
- Known risks can be priced into the contract. Unknown ones can't.

RESULT

- New trial. The jury is to leave the lost profits out entirely.

MY TAKE

- The report says the clerk was told the mill was stopped. Why didn't that count? Counsel for the carrier argued a notice to a clerk could not make a special contract. Ask in class.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. What makes a fact worth keeping in a brief?
2. Why write the issue as a yes-or-no question?
3. Why add to the outline at the end of each unit instead of before the exam?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

NOTES · LESSON 03 · PRACTICE

A brief

NAME AND DATE

FACTS: WHAT HAPPENED

QUESTION: WHAT HAD TO BE DECIDED

RULE: WHAT DECIDED IT

REASONING: WHY

RESULT

MY TAKE

Notes while reading

Reading notes

> **In five minutes.** Before reading tonight, write one question the chapter should answer. After reading, close the book and write one sentence saying what the chapter claims.

THE METHOD

1. Before reading, skim the headings, the first and last paragraphs, and any summary. Write two or three questions you expect the chapter to answer.
2. Read one section at a time. Beside the few lines that answer your questions, write a word or two in the margin saying why they matter.
3. At the end of each section, look away and say or write what it said. Then check.
4. At the end of the chapter, write one sentence in your own words stating what the chapter claims, not what it covers.
5. Inside the back cover or on one card, list page numbers with a few words each, as your own index to the book.
6. Within a week, answer your opening questions from memory before you open the book again.

REMEMBER

- **Before: skim, then write two or three questions.**
- **During: mark a few lines, with a word on why.**
- **After each section: look away and say it back.**
- **After the chapter: one sentence stating its claim in your words.**
- **Within a week: answer your questions before reopening the book.**

TRY IT · 30 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Open chapter 1 of the Enchiridion in the reader. Before reading, write two questions its first sentence raises. Read it once, copying at most three lines into your notes with a word on why each matters. Close it and write one sentence saying what Epictetus claims. Two days later, answer your two questions without opening it. About 20 minutes in all.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

Take the next nonfiction book or long report you read for work. Before each chapter, write one question you want it to answer. After each chapter, write one sentence that states its claim, not its topic. When you finish, the sentences together make a one-page version of the book. Keep that page with the book or in a file named for it.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON Chapter 1 of the Enchiridion, about 400 words

BOOK AND CHAPTER

- Epictetus, The Enchiridion, chapter 1. George Long's translation.

ONE SENTENCE FOR THIS CHAPTER

- Epictetus claims that only our own acts, such as opinion, desire and aversion, are in our power, and that treating anything else as ours is what leaves us hindered, disturbed and blaming others.

QUESTIONS IT RAISED

- Before reading: What does "in our power" mean? What is a reader supposed to do differently?
- Answered: our own acts of judgment, impulse, desire and aversion. Test each harsh appearance and let go of what is not ours.
- New: Is the body really not in our power? Training changes it. Is the effort ours and the result not?
- If office and wealth are not in our power, is wanting a promotion a mistake, or only chasing it at any cost?

WORDS AND NAMES TO LOOK UP

- hupolaepsis, hormae, echchlisis: Long's Greek, glossed as opinion, movement towards a thing, aversion.
- "offices (magisterial power)": public posts.
- "appearance": a technical word here? Find the Greek behind it.

WHERE I DISAGREE, OR WANT TO KNOW MORE

- "No man will harm you" sounds too strong. Harm to what, exactly? Maybe only to what is ours, our choices.

MARGIN NOTES WORTH KEEPING

- "Of things some are in our power, and others are not." The chapter in one line.
- "you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed": the cost.
- "leave alone some things entirely, and postpone others": saying no.
- "You are an appearance": the practice.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. Why write questions before you start reading?
2. Why should the chapter sentence state a claim and not a topic?
3. Which step does the research support most?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

NOTES · LESSON 04 · PRACTICE

Reading notes

BOOK AND CHAPTER

ONE SENTENCE FOR THIS CHAPTER

QUESTIONS IT RAISED

WORDS AND NAMES TO LOOK UP

WHERE I DISAGREE, OR WANT TO KNOW MORE

MARGIN NOTES WORTH KEEPING

Notes from a video

Notes from video lectures

> **In five minutes.** Next time you watch a lecture or explainer, pause it every five minutes. Before pressing play again, write one line in your own words with the time beside it.

THE METHOD

1. Write the video's title, speaker and length at the top of the page. Under it, write one question you want the video to answer.
2. Watch about five minutes, or to the end of a topic or slide. Then pause.
3. With the video paused, say the chunk's main point from memory. Then write it in your own words beside the time the chunk started.
4. In a third column, write one question that chunk answers. Leave the answer off the page.
5. Copy word for word only what must stay exact: a formula, a definition, a figure on screen. Use captions or a transcript to check a term, not to copy whole passages.
6. Speed up to 1.5x or 2x if the speaker is slow, and slow down for dense parts. Spend the saved minutes on the pauses.
7. Close the video and write a three-line summary. Within a few days, answer the questions cold, and rewatch only the chunks behind the ones you missed.

REMEMBER

- **Title, speaker and length at the top. One question going in.**
- **Pause every five minutes, or at each new topic.**
- **Say the point from memory, then write it in your words beside the time.**
- **One question per chunk, with the answer left off the page.**
- **Captions to catch a term. Up to 2x speed, slower when dense.**

TRY IT · 30 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Take the next recorded lecture for one course, or a 20-minute lecture from any open online course. Rule a page into three columns: time, note, question. Pause at least every five minutes and fill one row before going on. At the end, close the video and write a three-line summary. Two days later, cover the notes and answer the questions. Rewatch only the chunks you missed. About 30 minutes.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

Use the method on a training video, a recorded meeting or a long explainer you meant to watch anyway. Pause at each new topic and write the time, the point, and a question a teammate might ask about it. Afterward, send the summary and two time stamps to someone who missed it, so they can jump straight to the parts that matter.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON A 20-minute recorded lecture from an introductory philosophy course, on chapter 1 of the Enchiridion, watched at 1.5x

VIDEO, SPEAKER AND LENGTH

- Intro to Philosophy, week 3: Epictetus on control. Course instructor. 20 minutes, watched at 1.5x.
- My question going in: what does "in our power" mean?

TIME · NOTE, IN MY OWN WORDS · QUESTION TO TEST LATER

- 0:00 · Epictetus was born a slave and later freed. He taught and wrote nothing. His student Arrian wrote the teaching down, and the Enchiridion is a short handbook drawn from it. · Q: Why is the book not by Epictetus's own hand?
- 4:30 · The first line splits all things in two. Ours: opinion, impulse, desire, aversion, our own acts. Not ours: body, property, reputation, office. · Q: What goes on each side of the split?
- 9:10 · Mixing them up has a price: hindered, lamenting, blaming gods and people. · Q: What does it cost to treat what is not ours as ours?
- 13:40 · Great aims take more than a small effort. Some things get dropped, some put off. Chasing wealth and office as well risks both. · Q: Why not go after everything at once?
- 17:20 · The practice: tell a harsh impression "You are an appearance." Then ask whether it is in our power. If not, it does not concern you. (Rewound once. Captions on to catch "appearance".) · Q: What are the two steps when something harsh shows up?

SUMMARY, WRITTEN WITH THE VIDEO CLOSED

- Epictetus sorts everything into our own acts and everything else. Distress comes from treating the second kind as ours. The habit: stop at each harsh impression, ask which kind it is, and let go of what is not ours.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. Why pause the video instead of writing while it plays?
2. What does writing a question for each chunk add?
3. When do captions help, and when do they get in the way?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

NOTES · LESSON 05 · PRACTICE

Notes from a video

VIDEO, SPEAKER AND LENGTH

TIME	NOTE, IN MY OWN WORDS	QUESTION TO TEST LATER

SUMMARY, WRITTEN WITH THE VIDEO CLOSED

Notes for problems

Worked examples and an error log

> **In five minutes.** Take one problem you got wrong this week. On a card, write the problem, the step where it went wrong, and the rule you missed. Add a date three days out, and redo it then without looking.

THE METHOD

1. Write one step of a solution per line, with room to its right.
2. Beside every step, write why it is taken: the rule, formula or reason. "Divide by 0.8 to undo the discount."
3. Before reading the next step of a worked example, cover it and say what you expect it to be.
4. After studying an example, solve a similar problem with the example covered.
5. Log every problem you miss: the problem, what you did, where it went wrong, the rule or step you missed, and a retry date a few days out.
6. On the retry date, solve it again from a blank page. If it goes right, retire it. If not, log it again with a new date.

REMEMBER

- **One step per line. The reason beside it.**
- **Cover the next step of an example and predict it.**
- **After an example, solve a similar problem with it covered.**
- **Log each miss: problem, what I did, where it went wrong, rule missed, retry date.**
- **Retry from a blank page on the date. Retire it once it goes right.**

TRY IT · 30 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Take the next problem set for a math, science, accounting or programming course. Pick two worked examples from the lecture or textbook and write the reason beside every step, covering each step before you read it. Then do the set. For each problem you miss, fill one row of an error log with a retry date three days out. Retry on that date from a blank page. About 30 minutes, plus the retries.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

Use it on a skill that runs in steps: a spreadsheet formula, a tax form, a recipe scaled up, a bug you fixed. Write the steps of one solution with the reason beside each. Keep an error log for a month: each mistake, what you did, where it went wrong, and the rule you missed. Retry each one a few days later without notes.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON A percent problem from a business math course: one worked example studied with reasons, then one missed homework problem in the error log

WORKED EXAMPLE, WITH THE WHY

- A price rises 25% to $150. What was it before?
- Step 1: new = old × 1.25. Why: a 25% rise keeps all of the old price and adds a quarter.
- Step 2: old = 150 ÷ 1.25. Why: undo a multiplication by dividing.
- Step 3: old = $120. Check: 120 × 1.25 = 150.

PROBLEM

- A jacket costs $80 after a 20% discount. What was the original price?

WHAT I DID

- 80 × 1.20 = $96.

WHERE IT WENT WRONG

- I added 20% of the sale price. The discount was 20% of the original, not of $80. Check: $96 less 20% is $76.80, not $80.

THE RULE OR STEP I MISSED

- After a 20% discount, the sale price is 80% of the original. So original = 80 ÷ 0.80 = $100. Check: 100 × 0.80 = 80.
- Same move as the worked example: write the change as a multiplication, then divide to undo it.

RETRY ON

- Thursday, from a blank page, with new numbers: a coat costs $63 after a 30% discount.
- Thursday: 63 ÷ 0.70 = $90. Check: 90 × 0.70 = 63. Right the first time. Retired.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. Why write a reason beside every step?
2. Why cover the next step of a worked example before reading it?
3. What does an error log add to simply redoing the homework?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

NOTES · LESSON 06 · PRACTICE

An error log

One row per missed problem. Retry it from a blank page on the date in the last column.

PROBLEM	WHAT I DID	WHERE IT WENT WRONG	THE RULE OR STEP I MISSED	RETRY ON

NOTES · LESSON 07

The slip box

Zettelkasten

> **In five minutes.** Pick one idea from today. Write it on a card in two or three full sentences, without looking at the source. Number it 1. Tomorrow, write card 2 and note how it connects to 1.

THE METHOD

1. Keep three kinds of notes apart: quick jottings on anything, notes on what you read with the source, and the cards in the box.
2. Write each card about one idea, in full sentences and your own words, so it makes sense without the source beside it.
3. Give each card a fixed address. Number it after the card it continues, as 12, 12a, 12a1, or use the date. Never renumber.
4. Before filing a card, find one to three cards it relates to. Write their addresses on the new card, and the new address on them.
5. Add an index entry: a keyword with the address of one or two cards where a trail begins.
6. Once a jotting's idea is on a card, throw the jotting away. Keep the source notes in a separate file.

REMEMBER

- **One idea per card, in full sentences, in your own words.**
- **Give every card a fixed address. Never change it.**
- **Link each new card to one to three older cards, both ways.**
- **Keep an index of keywords pointing to where trails begin.**
- **Quotes and sources go in a separate file.**

TRY IT · 30 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Take three ideas from this week's lectures or reading, from different classes if you can. Write each on its own card in two to four sentences, without looking at the source. Number them 1, 2 and 3. On each card, write in one line which other card it connects to and how. Start an index card with three keywords. About 25 minutes.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

For one week, write a card each day for one idea from work: a lesson from a project, a line from a book, something a colleague explained. One idea per card, in sentences. Before filing each new card, link it to at least one older card. At the end of the week, follow the links and write one paragraph the cards together suggest.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON Three cards from chapter 1 of the Enchiridion, filed in a box that already holds notes from work

NOTE 14

- One idea, in my own words: Epictetus sorts everything into what is our own act and what is not. Opinion, desire and aversion are ours. Body, property, reputation and office are not. Only the first kind is fully free.
- Links to notes: 14a (what mixing them up costs), 14b (the test), 6 (project reviews)
- Source: Enchiridion 1, Long. Source notes in the file "Epictetus".

NOTE 14A

- One idea, in my own words: Distress comes from treating what belongs to others as our own. The costs he lists: being hindered, lamenting, being disturbed, blaming gods and people.
- Links to notes: 14 (continues it)
- Source: Enchiridion 1, Long

NOTE 14B

- One idea, in my own words: The practice is a question asked the moment something harsh appears: is this in my power? If not, it does not concern me. A habit to run, not a belief to hold.
- Links to notes: 14 (applies it), 6 (same test at work)
- Source: Enchiridion 1, Long

NOTE 6

- One idea, in my own words: In our launch review, the useful hour sorted causes into ones the team could change and ones it could not. Time on the second kind produced complaints and no changes.
- Links to notes: 14b (same sort, about 1,900 years older), added today
- Source: my notes, spring launch review

INDEX

- Control, what is up to me: 14
- Reviews and post-mortems: 6

CHECK YOURSELF

1. Why one idea per card?
2. Why give each card a fixed address that never changes?
3. Why write the card in your own words instead of copying the source?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

Slip-box notes

NOTE NUMBER

ONE IDEA, IN MY OWN WORDS

LINKS TO NOTES

SOURCE

NOTE NUMBER

ONE IDEA, IN MY OWN WORDS

LINKS TO NOTES

SOURCE

NOTE NUMBER

ONE IDEA, IN MY OWN WORDS

LINKS TO NOTES

SOURCE

NOTE NUMBER

ONE IDEA, IN MY OWN WORDS

LINKS TO NOTES

SOURCE

The commonplace book

Commonplace book

> **In five minutes.** Open a notebook to a blank page. Copy one line that stopped you this week, with author, title and page. Under it, write two lines of your own. Give it a one-word heading.

THE METHOD

1. Use one notebook. Number the pages. Leave the first two facing pages blank for an index.
2. When a passage stops you, copy it exactly, with the author, title and page.
3. Under it, write two or three lines in your own words: what it means, and where you might use it.
4. File it under a heading of one or two words. Write the heading in the margin so it shows at a glance.
5. Index the heading. Locke's way: a grid of first letters and vowels, so "Epistle" goes in the E-I square with its page number.
6. Every few months, read all the pages under one heading together and write a paragraph that joins them.

REMEMBER

- **One notebook. Numbered pages. First two facing pages kept for the index.**
- **Copy the passage exactly, with author, title and page.**
- **Under it, two or three lines in your own words.**
- **File it under a short heading, written in the margin.**
- **Reread a heading's pages together and write a paragraph joining them.**

TRY IT · 25 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

During one week of reading for a class, copy five passages onto a commonplace page, each with its source. Under each, write two lines in your own words, and give each a heading. At the end of the week, pick the heading with the most entries and write one paragraph that uses at least two of them. About 25 minutes across the week.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

Start a commonplace page for one question you keep coming back to at work, such as hiring, pricing or handing off a project. For a month, add any passage from a book, article, talk or colleague that bears on it, with the source and two lines of your own. Then write one paragraph answering the question from your entries.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON Three entries from one week of reading, two from chapter 1 of the Enchiridion and one from the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, then a paragraph joining one heading

HEADING: CONTROL

- Passage: Of things some are in our power, and others are not.
- Source: Epictetus, Enchiridion, chapter 1, Long's translation.
- Mine: The whole chapter rests on this one sort. Use it the next time a delayed flight or a bad review eats an evening: which part of this is mine?

HEADING: SAYING NO

- Passage: you must leave alone some things entirely, and postpone others for the present.
- Source: Epictetus, Enchiridion, chapter 1, Long's translation.
- Mine: Big aims cost other things. Worth rereading when the calendar is full and someone asks for one more project.

HEADING: CONTROL

- Passage: Take away thy opinion, and then there is taken away the complaint, "I have been harmed."
- Source: Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Book 4, section 7, Long's translation, 1862.
- Mine: Same move as Epictetus: the harm runs through the opinion. Marcus thanks Rusticus in Book 1 for the discourses of Epictetus, so the echo may be a debt.

CONTROL, READ THROUGH

- Two writers, one idea. Epictetus sorts what is mine from what is not. Marcus shows what the sort does: drop the opinion and the complaint goes with it. Neither says the flight was not late. Both say the evening is still mine.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. Why write two lines of your own under each passage?
2. Why file entries under headings instead of by source?
3. What does an index do for a notebook that grows without a plan?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

A commonplace page

HEADING · THE PASSAGE OR IDEA · WHERE IT CAME FROM

SOURCE

SOURCE

SOURCE

SOURCE

SOURCE

SOURCE

Franklin's method

Franklin's method

> **In five minutes.** Pick one paragraph you admire. Write a hint of five words or fewer for each sentence. Tomorrow, rewrite the paragraph from the hints alone, then compare it with the original.

THE METHOD

1. Choose a short piece you admire, 300 to 800 words: an essay, an explanation, a well-made argument.
2. For each sentence, write a hint of a few words that catches its sense. Leave out its wording.
3. Put the original away for two or three days.
4. From the hints alone, write the piece out in full, in whatever words come.
5. Compare your version with the original, sentence by sentence. Mark where yours is weaker, and where it is better.
6. Another time, shuffle the hints, wait a few weeks, and put them back in order before you write. This trains arrangement.

REMEMBER

- **Pick a short piece you admire.**
- **One hint per sentence: its sense in a few words.**
- **Wait two or three days.**
- **Rebuild from the hints, then compare line by line.**
- **Another time, shuffle the hints and restore the order first.**

TRY IT · 40 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Start with Franklin's own paragraph about the Spectator, in chapter 2 of the Autobiography, or one well-written page from a textbook. Write a hint of under eight words for each sentence. Two days later, rebuild the passage from your hints in 20 minutes, then compare it with the original. Underline the three places where your version lost something.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

Take an email, memo or proposal from your field that worked well. Write a hint for each paragraph on a card. A week later, write it again from the cards, as if for your own project, and compare. Note one move the original made that yours did not, and use it in your next real one.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON Three sentences from chapter 2 of Franklin's Autobiography, on why a positive manner backfires

HINT: THE SENSE OF THE SENTENCE

- 1. To inform: sounding certain invites pushback.
- 2. To learn: seem fixed, sensible people leave you wrong.
- 3. To please or persuade: same manner fails.

REBUILT FROM THE HINT, LATER

- 1. If you want to inform people, a confident, certain way of putting your views makes them argue back and stop listening.
- 2. If you want to learn from others but talk as though your mind is made up, sensible people won't bother to argue and will leave you with your mistake.
- 3. That manner also fails if you want to please people or win them over.

THE ORIGINAL

- 1. For, if you would inform, a positive and dogmatical manner in advancing your sentiments may provoke contradiction and prevent a candid attention.
- 2. If you wish information and improvement from the knowledge of others, and yet at the same time express yourself as firmly fix'd in your present opinions, modest, sensible men, who do not love disputation, will probably leave you undisturbed in the possession of your error.
- 3. And by such a manner, you can seldom hope to recommend yourself in pleasing your hearers, or to persuade those whose concurrence you desire.

COMPARED

- 1. "Prevent a candid attention" names what is lost, a fair hearing. "Stop listening" is vaguer.
- 2. Mine dropped "who do not love disputation", the reason they leave you alone. "Undisturbed in the possession of your error" beats "with your mistake".
- 3. Mine lost "those whose concurrence you desire", the people you actually need. Mine is plainer. Keep that.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. Why should a hint hold the sense and not the wording?
2. Why wait days before rebuilding?
3. What does shuffling the hints train?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

NOTES · LESSON 09 · PRACTICE

Hints and rebuild

HINT: THE SENSE OF THE SENTENCE	REBUILT FROM THE HINT, LATER

NOTES · LESSON 10

Coming back to them

Weekly review

> **In five minutes.** This Friday, set a timer for ten minutes. Take this week's notes for one class or project, cover each page, and say its main point aloud before you look.

THE METHOD

1. Set a fixed time each week, 20 to 30 minutes. Same day, same place.
2. Gather the week's notes in one place: pages, cards and files.
3. Test first. Cover each page and answer its questions, or say its main points, from memory. Then check.
4. Mark what you missed. Fix or add to the note while it is open.
5. Write one line for the week: the idea from these pages most worth keeping.
6. Bring older pages back. Each review, test yourself on one page from a month or more ago.

REMEMBER

- **Same time every week, 20 to 30 minutes.**
- **Gather the week's notes in one place.**
- **Cover each page and answer from memory. Then check.**
- **Mark the gaps and fix the notes.**
- **One line for the week. One older page retested.**

TRY IT · 25 MINUTES

FOR A CLASS

Choose a 25-minute slot this week. Take every page of notes from the past seven days for one course. For each page, cover it and write the main points from memory, then check and mark the gaps in a different color. Finish with one sentence for the week. Next week, start by retesting what you marked.

FOR WORK AND LIFE

On Friday, give 20 minutes to the week's notes from meetings, reading and calls. For each one, say or write the decision, the open question and the next step without looking, then check. Carry each open question to Monday's list. Once a month, do the same with notes from four weeks back.

What it looks like done

WORKED ON A weekly review page for a week that included chapter 1 of the Enchiridion, kept by someone taking an evening philosophy class alongside a full-time job

THE WEEK OF

- Week 3 of term. Two lecture pages, one Cornell page on Enchiridion 1, four pages of meeting notes from work.

WHAT I LEARNED

- Epictetus sorts everything into what is in our power, our own acts, and what is not. Treating the second kind as ours is where the frustration and blame come from.
- At work: the launch slips a week, and the cause is the vendor's, not ours.

WHAT I'LL TEST MYSELF ON

- Covered the Cornell page and answered the cues: 4 of 5. Missed why chasing office and wealth too might cost both.
- Monday: the five cues again, plus the week 1 lecture page, cold.

NOTES TO CONNECT OR REWRITE

- Rewrite the Cornell summary. It named the topic, not the claim.
- Link the harsh-appearance test to the meeting note on the vendor delay.

WHAT SLIPPED, AND WHAT I'LL CHANGE

- Skipped Wednesday's same-day pass through the lecture notes. Move it to the train home.

NEXT WEEK

- Chapter 2 in the reader. Review Friday at 6, 25 minutes.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. Why test yourself before rereading during a review?
2. Why review every week instead of before the exam?
3. Why bring an older page into each review?

Answers at the back of the workbook.

NOTES · LESSON 10 · PRACTICE

A review page

THE WEEK OF

WHAT I LEARNED

WHAT I'LL TEST MYSELF ON

NOTES TO CONNECT OR REWRITE

WHAT SLIPPED, AND WHAT I'LL CHANGE

NEXT WEEK

Check yourself: answers

LESSON 01 · WHAT NOTES ARE FOR

1. **What are the two jobs notes do?** Encoding: deciding what to write helps you take the idea in while you write. Storage: the page keeps a record to come back to. A page can do one job well and the other poorly.
2. **Why write main ideas in your own words, and copy only some things exactly?** Putting an idea in your own words forces a decision about what it means, and that decision helps it stick. Definitions, numbers, formulas, names and quotes have to stay exact to stay useful.
3. **What does the pen-or-laptop research show?** It disagrees. The first study favored longhand, two replications found no reliable difference, and a later meta-analysis found a small edge for handwriting. What you do on the page matters more than the tool.

LESSON 02 · THE CORNELL PAGE

1. **Why leave the cue column empty during the lecture?** Writing the questions later forces a second pass through the notes within a day, while memory is fresh. Deciding what each part was about is where much of the work happens.
2. **Why cover the notes and answer the questions instead of rereading?** Answering from memory is a test. It shows what you actually know and makes it stronger. Rereading feels easier and tells you little about what you can recall.
3. **What makes a good cue question?** One you have to think to answer: why, how, what happens if. A single word with a question mark asks nothing.

LESSON 03 · BRIEF IT, THEN OUTLINE IT

1. **What makes a fact worth keeping in a brief?** The result depends on it. If a fact could change and the outcome would stay the same, cut it.
2. **Why write the issue as a yes-or-no question?** It forces you to find the exact point in dispute. A yes-or-no question has one answer, the holding, and the reasoning then has to explain it.
3. **Why add to the outline at the end of each unit instead of before the exam?** Merging a few fresh briefs keeps each step small, and the deciding stays yours. An outline started the week before exams turns into copying.

LESSON 04 · NOTES WHILE READING

1. **Why write questions before you start reading?** Questions give the reading a purpose. You notice the lines that answer them, and later the same questions become a test you can take without the book.
2. **Why should the chapter sentence state a claim and not a topic?** A topic can be written without understanding the chapter. A claim says what the author argues, so writing one shows whether you followed it.
3. **Which step does the research support most?** Answering your own questions from memory, days later. A large review rated testing yourself high, and highlighting, summarizing and rereading low.

LESSON 05 · NOTES FROM A VIDEO

1. **Why pause the video instead of writing while it plays?** While it plays, the speaker keeps going and attention splits. A pause gives time to recall the chunk and put it in your own words, and lessons taken in segments are learned better.
2. **What does writing a question for each chunk add?** It turns the notes into a test for later. In one study, short quizzes between parts of a lecture reduced mind wandering and improved learning of the parts that followed.
3. **When do captions help, and when do they get in the way?** They help catch terms and fast speech, and help most in a second language or a new topic. Copying them word for word skips deciding what mattered.

LESSON 06 · NOTES FOR PROBLEMS

1. **Why write a reason beside every step?** Steps alone fit only the problem they came from. The reason, the rule each step applies, is what carries over to the next problem that looks different.
2. **Why cover the next step of a worked example before reading it?** Predicting the step makes you explain the example to yourself. Students who learn most from examples tend to anticipate the next step and name the principle behind it.

3. **What does an error log add to simply redoing the homework?** It names the exact step that went wrong and the rule missed, then sets a retry from a blank page days later. The mistake becomes feedback and a delayed test.

LESSON 07 · THE SLIP BOX

1. **Why one idea per card?** A card can only be linked as a whole. One idea per card lets each idea join any trail without dragging two others along.
2. **Why give each card a fixed address that never changes?** Links point at addresses. Renumbering would break every link to the card. A fixed address also lets a new card branch off any old one, as 12a after 12.
3. **Why write the card in your own words instead of copying the source?** What you produce yourself is remembered better than what you read. A card in full sentences also still makes sense years later, without the source beside it.

LESSON 08 · THE COMMONPLACE BOOK

1. **Why write two lines of your own under each passage?** Copying stores the words. Your own lines digest them: what the passage means and where you would use it. That is the step from gathering to making something of your own.
2. **Why file entries under headings instead of by source?** Headings bring reading done years apart onto the same pages. Opening one heading puts everything gathered on that subject in one place.
3. **What does an index do for a notebook that grows without a plan?** Entries go in the order they come. The index records where each heading lives, so anything can be found without ever sorting the book.

LESSON 09 · FRANKLIN'S METHOD

1. **Why should a hint hold the sense and not the wording?** If the hint keeps the wording, rebuilding becomes copying. A hint that holds only the sense makes you find the words yourself, and the comparison then shows what the original did better.
2. **Why wait days before rebuilding?** The same afternoon, the original's wording is still in your ear. After a few days it has faded, so the rebuild tests your own recall and your own writing.
3. **What does shuffling the hints train?** Arrangement. Putting scrambled hints back in order forces a decision about what comes first and why, before any sentence gets written.

LESSON 10 · COMING BACK TO THEM

1. **Why test yourself before rereading during a review?** Answering from memory shows what you actually kept, and the effort makes it stronger. Reading first makes every page look familiar, and the gaps stay hidden.
2. **Why review every week instead of before the exam?** Forgetting is steepest early. A short weekly pass catches it while the relearning is still small. By exam time most of the early forgetting has already happened.
3. **Why bring an older page into each review?** Older notes fade too. Retesting one page from a month back keeps it from slipping and spreads the practice out over time.