Reworking Your Notes

In Objective 4 of the Study Skills Workshop, you learned the importance of taking notes. In this handout, you will learn to rework your notes for use when studying for homework and tests. “Reworking notes” simply means that you look over your class notes, fill in any missing details, and then put the information in a new, easy-to-study format.

Identify the Concepts. As soon as possible after class, sit down with your notes and identify the key concepts that were discussed in your lecture. Key concepts are usually identified by definitions, rules, or formulas.

Identify the Key Examples. Once you have identified a key concept, find all the examples that were used to illustrate that concept. Make sure that you understand each example, and fill in any missing steps if that helps you to understand the example. Give the reason for each step in the example.

Use a Format That Works for You. You can rework your notes in a variety of ways, depending on personal preference and learning style. You can use index cards or a study sheet divided into three columns, or if you are an auditory learner (or spend a great deal of time in the car), you can rework your notes in audio form.

- **Index card format:** Make a tab for your cards that states a key concept. On the front of the first index card, write the concept. On the back of the card, write the definition or formula that you want to memorize. Using an index card for each example, write the example on the front of the card. On the back, describe each step of the example and state the reason for each step. Repeat this process for every concept learned. Store your index cards in a box and group the cards by concept.

- **Three-column study sheet:** Divide an 8 1/2 × 11 sheet of paper into three columns. Label the left column “Concept,” the middle column “Example,” and the right column “Steps and Reasons.” Rewrite your notes, filling in the columns on your study sheet as labeled.

- **Make a recording:** Once recording, state a key concept. Pause for a few seconds, and then state the definition or formula. State an example and then explain each step. Continue to state examples and steps. Repeat for the remaining concepts.

How to Use Your Reworked Notes:

- **Index cards:** Look at the concept on the first card in a group. Attempt to state the definition or the rule. If you are unable to do so, read the back of the card. Keep doing this until you can recite the definition or rule for each concept from memory. Then look at the example and see if you can work the problem without help of any kind. If you have trouble with this, the steps are written on the back and you need only turn the card over to look at them. Continue to rework the problem until you can do it without looking at the solution.

- **Three-column study sheet:** Go through the concepts and examples. Be sure to cover the work in the right column with your hand or a piece of paper as you attempt to solve the problem in the middle column. If you get stuck, uncover the work in the right column to look at the steps. Continue to rework the problem until you can do it without looking at the solution.

- **Recorded notes:** In the pause between each phase of the problem, see if you can recite the steps before they are revealed on the tape. Repeat until you can recite all of the steps on your own.
Now Try This

1. Decide which format is the best one for you to rework your notes. If you think of a format that is different from those listed above, describe your format.

2. Rework your notes from the most recent lecture in your chosen format.