

Skill Builder

How to Read & Take Notes College Style

Connection Point

In your notebook answer the following question:

How do you build a house?

Do not just use your fast thinking. Intentionally tap into your slow thinking, laying out the process of how someone would go from land with trees to a nice, suburban style house.



How Do You Build a House?

Consider this scenario:

Janice really wanted a house. Apartment living had worn her nerves thin. She had worked and saved for years until she finally had enough money to pay cash for her house. Oh, but this isn't just any house. It is a brand new house. She worked with the architect and designers to tweak the floor plan to be exactly how she wanted. The money was paid. The deal was closed. It was time to build the house.

The workers showed up the first day ready to work. They brought out cans of paint and started painting everywhere they could paint. While the first workers were painting, a second group came in with a bit of carpet and some decorations, hanging pieces of art from the newly painted tree branches. Meanwhile a third group came in with lumber, positioning the wood for what would become the roof. At the end of the first day, Janice was a bit... confused by the whole process. But they were the professionals, she would let them do the work as they saw fit.

Day two began with the big equipment. The cement truck rolled in, running over the couch and dining room table, and started to pour cement on the freshly painted grass and trees. While the cement truck was spreading cement, the bulldozers came rolling through the newly poured cement, clearing out the trees that were adorned with the pieces of art. It was at this time the electrician came in and started to run electrical wires....

How did this version of building a house compare to the process you wrote down? While you or I are not house building experts, it is easy to see that something is wrong with the process of building Janice's house. So what is the lesson we learn from Janet's nightmare? **Order matters.**

Just having the right parts and pieces, or even the right set of skills, does not matter if the order of assembly is wrong. When events take place in the wrong order, you end up with a giant mess. As a real life example, in China, a brand new 13 story apartment complex toppled to the ground. The problem: the builders neglected to pour the cement when laying the foundation. They skipped a step, and the whole building fell.

Order and process matter.

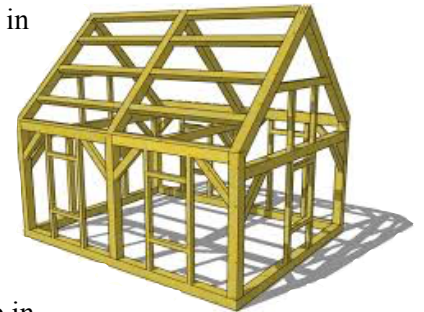


The Framing Strategy

In a college class non-fiction reading matters. A lot. In AP/College classes, a teacher only has time to explain and discuss about 50-60% of the important information in class. The other 40-50% is entrusted to the reading. If information appears in the reading, the student is expected to know it. A significant portion of what the student is expected to learn, and may be tested on, will be covered in class or in a video from the instructor.

When many students approach reading non-fiction, they do it in the same way they read Harry Potter or any other fiction story. They start in the upper left hand corner, they read every sentence, in order, until all the sentences have been read. This is a great reading strategy for fiction books, because in fiction, every sentence in a story is another thread in the tapestry of the story line. One sentence, or even one word, can change the entire direction in the arc of events.

Non-fiction is not written this way. Non-fiction text is trying to make a logical argument using sound reasoning and evidence to support its point. Every sentence serves a purpose, but in a different way than fiction. Harvard University actually teaches their incoming freshman to read non-fiction in a different way than fiction. In this course, the recommended non-fiction reading technique will be called **framing**. You are to read non-fiction like you build a house: Foundation, Frame, Decoration.



READING NON-FICTION:

- **FOUNDATION** - Figure out the general themes of the argument *before* getting into the details of the reading. This allows the brain to understand or comprehend the larger points and to “connect” to previous knowledge before getting caught up in the details.
 1. **READ THE TITLE AND ALL THE HEADINGS & SUBHEADINGS.** The titles, headings, and subheadings are where the author outlines the broad ideas of the text. If you are reading a book with many chapters, read all the chapter titles first or skim the table of contents. If you are reading a single chapter, read all the headings and subheadings. By reading these first, it shows the entire logical argument and lays the foundation for the brain to build the structure upon.
 2. **READ THE INTRODUCTION & CONCLUSION.** Typically a non-fiction text has an introductory paragraph that introduces the main idea. At the end, there is typically a conclusion paragraph where all the big ideas and key points are summarized and connected. Within these two paragraphs the author both introduces the purpose of the chapter and paints a concise picture of the essential concepts.
 3. **PAUSE & RECALL.** After Steps 1 & 2, *pause*. Close your eyes or look away from the text and force your brain to recall the intellectual outline of the chapter/text. If you can, **say it out loud**. If you can't do it with 100% recall, re-read them and try again. **Do not move on until you can do so.** This process does two things. First, it really engrains the conceptual framework of the text into the brain. Second, it strengthens the brain's ability to recall information. Once you are able to recall the major premise of the text, your brain now “Understands” the big ideas of the text, and can begin to focus on the details. Remember: Reading does not automatically lead to recall. Recalling leads to improved recalling.
- **FRAME** - Now that the foundation of the text has been laid, it is time to build the frame. In most academic non-fiction, two assumptions can be made. First, each paragraph contains one big idea that relates to the broader theme of the text (in particular, to the major heading/subheading it is located under). Second, the beginning sentence(s) of the paragraph serves as a thesis for the entire paragraph. Understand the first sentence and you understand the paragraph. These first sentences are essential to building the “Frame” of the argument.
 4. **READ ALL THE FIRST SENTENCES.** Depending on the length and complexity of the text, you can approach this one of two ways: (A) Read all the first sentences of the entire text/chapter or (B) Read all the first sentences of the bold headed sections. You can bend and mold how you apply it depending on the day, time and task to what suits you best.
 5. **PAUSE & RECALL.** Once all the first sentences are read, pause, look away, and recall. You **NEED** to be able to understand/explain the flow of the arguments made by the first sentences in the text before moving on. This is where the hard work of learning is done. Once you are able to recall and retell the argument/logical

flow of the headings and first sentences, you should now understand the text and the broader themes the author is conveying. There are not going to be any major plot twists. No sudden surprises.

- **DECORATION** - The foundation is laid and the frame has been built. NOW it is time to read the rest of the sentences. Your brain already understood the big ideas, so you can read with the mindset of gaining better insight, depth, and clarity. If you come across a sentence or two you do not understand, go back to the big idea of the paragraph and the section and try to understand the purpose of that sentence in the context of the entire section.

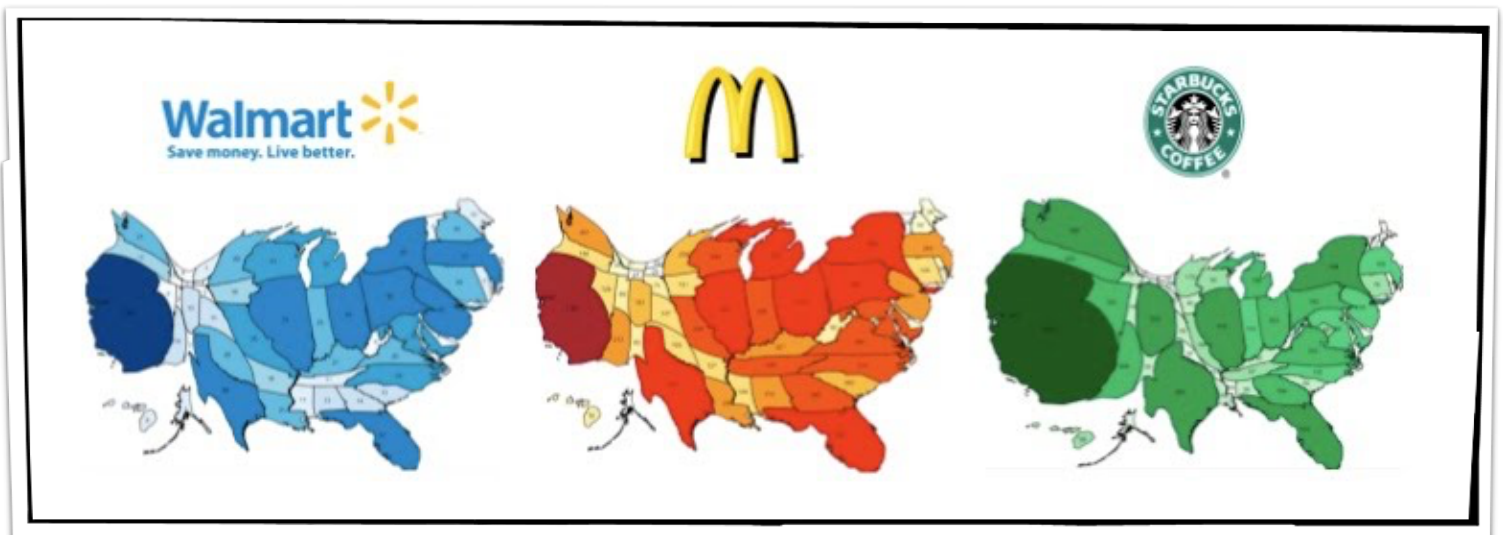
What is at stake if you don't change your approach?

When many students read the first sentence, followed by the second, followed by the third... They spend a large amount of their time and mental energy trying to sort out "What is the main point? What information is important compared to what is just side detail?" This is the mental equivalent of trying to hang pictures while putting down carpet as the cement truck is pouring cement. The final result is a giant mental mess.

With the Framing Technique, all these questions are clearly answered. The Big Ideas are in the headings. The Key Concepts are in the first sentences. The rest is explanatory detail. This will revolutionize the entire learning process, from how you take notes to cutting down on the time you will need to study.

WARNING!!! A Note about Pictures and Maps in a College Textbook. Many students view pictures and maps in a textbook as space fillers, celebrating that as space they can ignore in order to move through the readings faster. In a college textbook, it is quite the opposite. A picture is worth a thousand words, while a map is worth a million. Pictures and maps (ESPECIALLY maps), play two key roles:

- **Images** in this book relate to the text they are positioned near. Since the brain stores images, the images associate abstract ideas with something visually concrete. If there is a picture, *understand why it is there*. It will help your brain store the information more effectively.
- **Maps** provide a visualization and application of data and information from the text. In AP World History, the maps matter. You **MUST** understand the trends and patterns of the maps. *Information from the maps will be on the test*. You will also be expected to reference information from the maps in papers or writings.



From Theory to Reality

Perfect practice makes perfect. This next section is an opportunity to practice the Framing Technique. Practice the Foundation & Frame technique on the selection below: read the Titles/Headings/Subheadings. Pause & recall. Repeat until you are able to accurately retell a summary of the big concepts of the essay. Also, time yourself. See how long it takes you to complete this task.

Does Geography Determine Destiny?

What impact does humanity have in shaping its collective destiny?

Environmental Determinism

In the late 1800s, Friedrich Ratzel created the theory of Environmental determinism: that human society is controlled by the environment surrounding it.

Possibilism

Parallel to Ratzel's ideas, there was a growing rejection of Environmental Determinism.

Do We Have a Solution?

Yet, for all the promise of Possibilism, there are still many critics.

Follow-Up: In your notebook, jot down the answers to the following questions: How long did it take you to complete this task? How many times did you have to re-read & recall to get the general theme connected in your brain? What other ideas or examples came to mind while reading the text?

Now, here is the same text to read with all the details available. Keeping the main themes in mind, read this text for details. Time how long this step takes.

Does Geography Determine Destiny?

What impact does humanity have in shaping its collective destiny? As humanity enters the 21st century, the human race is faced with a series of challenges. There are now seven billion humans on the planet. Farmable land and drinkable water are decreasing. Earth's temperature is rising. What role does humanity have in controlling its fate? Are humans bound to the conditions of the planet? Or do humans have a level of control in creating their own future?

Environmental Determinism

In the late 1800s, Friedrich Ratzel created the theory of Environmental Determinism: that human society is controlled by the environment surrounding it. In many ways this theory follows with "common sense." If there is a desert, there will be limited food and water. If there is limited food and water, not many people will live there. Conversely, if there are rivers and fertile land, there will be plentiful vegetation and animal life. If there are abundant food and water sources, the area will be able to support a large number of people. With a large number of people, there will be the development of advanced society. If the water suddenly dries up, there will be no food and the society will quickly collapse. Ratzel points to this pattern of logic as the key driver of human history, and as the foundation for making future decisions.

Possibilism

Parallel to Ratzel's ideas, there was a growing rejection of Environmental Determinism. By the early 1900s, the Industrial Revolution was displaying its immense power to overcome nature. Machines were accomplishing feats that mankind never dreamed possible. Run out of water? Machines can drill deeper or push water through pipes to the area. No food? Food can be shipped in quickly by vehicles. Gravity? The airplane. Water currents? Steamboats. Too hot? Air conditioning. Too cold? Heaters. Too dark? The light bulb. People living far apart? Cellular phones. Paul de La Blanche saw these advances as humanity striking against nature, calling his theory Possibilism. Blanche believed that humanity could shape nature and in turn control its fate.

Do We Have a Solution?

Yet, for all the promise of Possibilism, there are still many critics. If "anything is possible," why are there 1 billion starving people on the planet? Why do some people have cell phones and the internet, while others are still using stone and animal tools? Why can we not prevent hurricanes or other natural disasters? Why are Antarctica or the Sahara Desert not teeming with human life and advanced cities? While humanity has used machines to overcome a great many challenges, there is still a level of control the Earth has over its inhabitants.

Reflect: How long did it take for you to read the essay? How would you rate your ease of understanding the text and the nuances in it? Is there anything about the essay you struggled with or didn't understand?

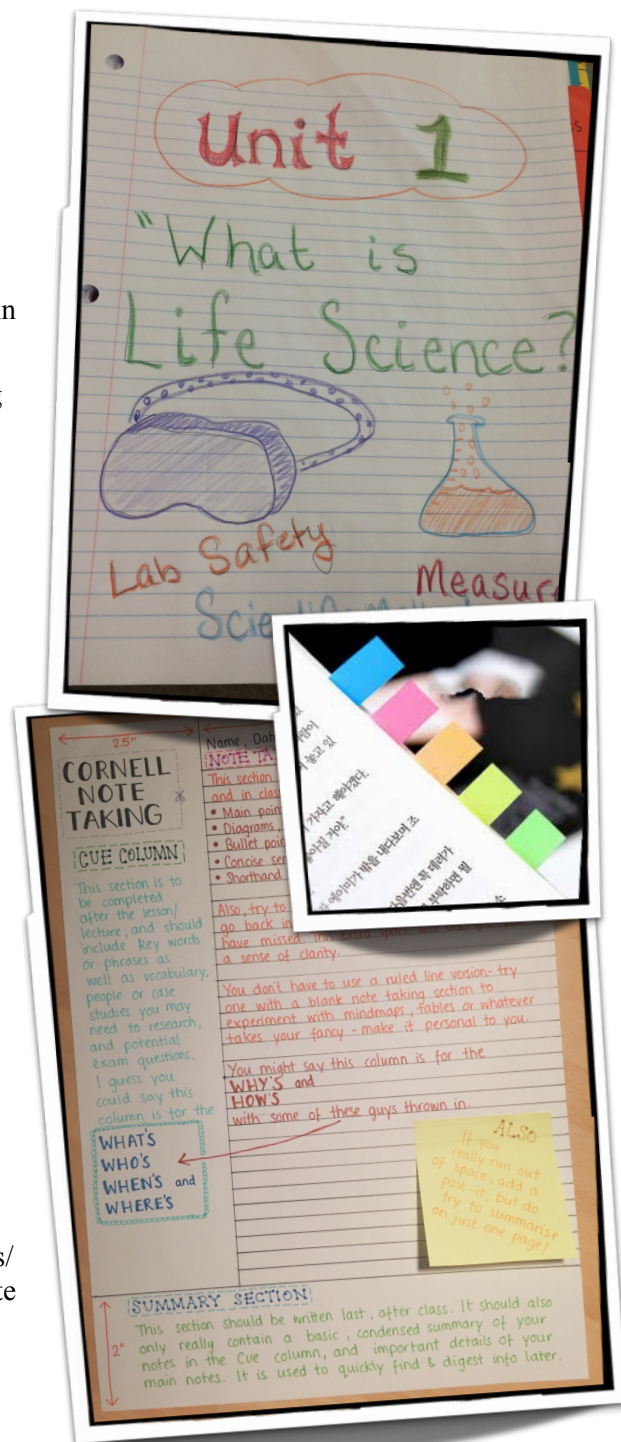
About Notebooks - Organization Principles

How a student structures their notebook lays the foundation for future success. The notebook is the place where students store summaries of their learning, connections to prior knowledge, and serve as graphic organizers. The notebook becomes the “central hub” of the student’s learning experience. In a college class, if a student does not have an organized notebook, they are setting themselves up to struggle before the course even begins. Here are a few simple tips for notebook success:

- **One Notebook, One Subject.** This cannot be emphasized enough. Each subject needs its own notebook. Don’t mix. It is like having a black bean burrito and cookie dough ice cream. When math problems end up next to Shakespeare, intermixed with Population/Migration material... it becomes very difficult to be a functional learner at a high level.

The same concept applies with having a folder for the course. Have one folder where important papers for JUST that class can be kept. Plastic sheet protectors are a way of taking this concept to the next level, as the papers do not get as beat up. The course folder can be kept in the notebook so they stay together.

- **The Binder Variation:** A variation to the notebook is using a 3 ring binder with dividers and loose leaf notebook paper. Each activity goes on its own sheet of paper, and that paper gets placed in the appropriate section of the binder. This allows for greater flexibility in organizing information.
- **Create a “Splash Page” for each Unit.** Take one page, and write in big words “Unit 1:...” Then, start the notes on the next page. When the unit is done, take the next available page, and write “Unit 2...” This way, when you flip through your notebook, it will be very clear where one unit’s information ends, and where the next begins. This may not seem like a big deal in the first part of the course, but it makes a massive difference when reviewing for the midterm, final, or AP Exam. If the brain likes structure, splash pages help provide a visible structure.
 - **Sticky Notes Tabs:** Place a sticky note on the end of each Splash Page so that the end sticks out beyond the page. The end result is a visible reminder of where a unit begins. This creates a navigational system to access your information faster. This will help you study in less time, because you will spend less time looking for information.
- **Titles and Dates.** Put the title AND DATE at the top of EVERY page. If the page contains class notes, write “Class Notes.” If the information is from a certain video, put the video’s title in big letters at the top. Again, this speeds up navigation when you are looking for information.
- **Colors.** The brain LOVES color. It is a way of keeping your brain’s attention, both while taking notes and when re-reading them. It can also add a new-ness or excitement, boosting intellectual interest. Color can also be used to be a “hook” to help store information in the brain. For example: try writing **vocabulary** in one color, **key themes** in another...
- **Writing Size.** The human brain recognizes differences, creating patterns/associations amongst the information it sees. If a topic is important, write it **bigger** or **bolder**. Upon re-reading, your eyes will see the information faster and will recognize the information as being **more important**.



2 Column Notes

The Why. Given the volume and importance of non-fiction reading, an essential companion skill is effective note taking. Taking notes is often viewed by students as a waste of their time. Students spend the time wondering what is important or critical to write down. This leads to students either writing down everything or next to nothing. As students write information, they don't really have a "format." It is common for them to start in the upper left corner and write a bulleted list of seemingly important information. With this method of taking notes, the students are right: they have wasted their time. The notes that were taken were worthless and unusable. *The purpose of taking notes is three fold:*


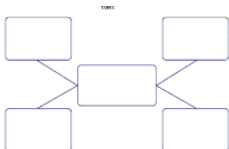
1. It creates an easily portable summary of the lesson. If taken correctly, the notes provide a key outline of major themes and topics that should be more accessible when studying than going back through the textbook.
2. The process of reading (as explained above) paired with the method of taking notes (as explained below) works with the brain to help store information better into long term memory during the first encounter with a text. This results in more robust learning in less time.
3. Notes *personalize* knowledge. Notes come to life when you put yourself on the page. While you are reading and taking notes, your brain will be pulling up related experiences and pieces of information from previous memories. As your brain pulls these memories forward, put them into your notes and try to visually capture them on the page. Did that paragraph bring to mind an idea from another chapter? Write it down. A picture or an image? Draw it out. A way of organizing a collection of thoughts? Map it out. Put YOUR EXPERIENCES and YOUR BRAIN into your notes. When you go through your notes later, it will remind you of and reinforce those connections and neuro-pathways; helping you remember and recall the information more efficiently.

The How. A note-taking system needs to be organized in a way that makes it easily navigated. The 2 Column Notes strategy, also referred to as Cornell Notes, works WITH the Framing Reading strategy outlined earlier. The two work together in concert and make for better, faster learning with less effort.

Chapter Title - Section A	
Headings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big Idea from Paragraph 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imp. Detail - Example - Personal Connection • Big Idea from Paragraph 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vocab Word & Def - Example
Headings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big Idea from Paragraph 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal Connection: Agree/disagree/emotion • Reflections on Map #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trend #1 - Patterns, Comparisons

Connecting Idea in different unit, Something important to stand out...

Academic Doodling == Awesome!

SUMMARY: NOTE TAKING

Skill
Builder

U1: The
Space
Between

U2: Econ.,
Dev &
Gender

U3: Pop &
Migration

- **Step 0:** Use ONE 5-Subject Notebook or Binder for this course (either digital or paper-based).
- **Step 1:** Put the TITLE and DATE of the reading at the top.
- **Step 2:** Draw a line down the length of the page, 2-3 inches from the left margin.
- **Step 3:** Begin The Framing Reading strategy.
 - **The Left Column: Place headings & Subheadings.** The purpose of this column is for navigation. It shows where information is on the page, for easy navigation.
 - **The Right Column:** This is where the key important information and take aways from the text are placed. The following should be placed on the right column:
 - ▶ *An abbreviated summary of the first sentence of each paragraph.* These are the big ideas. They need to appear in the notes. Choose a special symbol that is ONLY used for these key concept/first sentence pieces of information. When reading your notes later, it will visually help your brain differentiate between big-essential ideas and smaller-supporting details.
 - ▶ *Beneath each big idea, indent the line while beginning with a second symbol for other important details, facts, vocabulary words.* Having the second symbol is crucial for visibly seeing the difference between main ideas and smaller details. These details are words/concepts that you think are essential knowledge to understanding the main idea of the paragraph. Also, write down relevant examples that demonstrate key ideas. Examples are critical to connecting ideas into your brain, as well as preparing you to apply concepts in other coursework.
 - ▶ *Put key themes and trends from the maps and images.* What “Big ideas” was the map trying to convey? What patterns or trends were visible? Which regions of the map were doing well or poorly?
 - ▶ *DO NOT USE complete sentences.* Abbreviate. Use symbols to make your point. Draw arrows. Put emotional expressions and emoji’s. Use colors. Your notes should NOT be longer than the original text. Example:

“There is uneven development in impoverished countries in Africa.” BECOMES:

Africa: Dev => Uneven 😞
 - ▶ *In the other empty space, put other insights.* Use word bubbles filled with connections from other units or reminders of important relationships. Draw pictures related to the topic. Create graphic organizers, visualizing the organization of information. Insert a big question mark (?) next to areas you didn’t fully understand or an exclamation point by something super-important. How you use this space is what will breathe life and value into your notes and note taking, working WITH your brain to better store and recall knowledge.
- **Step 4:** Summarize. At the end, write a brief summary of the big ideas or take aways from the section of text.

From Theory to Reality

Using the process outlined above, take notes on the “Does Geography Determine Destiny” essay (on the following page) in your notebook. Time how long it takes for you to complete the task. When you are finished, compare your notes with the example notes shown after.

Does Geography Determine Destiny?

What impact does humanity have in shaping its collective destiny? As humanity enters the 21st century, the human race is faced with a series of challenges. There are now seven billion humans on the planet. Farmable land and drinkable water are decreasing. Earth's temperature is rising. As the earth changes, what role does humanity have in controlling its fate? Are humans bound to the conditions of the planet? Or, do humans have a level of control in creating their own future?

Environmental Determinism

In the late 1800s, Friedrich Ratzel created the theory of Environmental determinism: that human society is controlled by the environment surrounding it. In many ways this theory follows with "common sense." If there is a desert, there will be limited food and water. If there is limited food and water, not many people will live there. Conversely, if there are rivers and fertile land, there will be plentiful vegetation and animal life. If there are abundant food and water sources, the area will be able to support a large number of people. With a large number of people, there will be the development of advanced society. If the water suddenly dries up, there will be no food, and the society will quickly collapse. Ratzel points to this pattern of logic as the key driver of human history, and as the foundation for making future decisions.

Possibilism

Parallel to Ratzel's ideas, there was a growing rejection of Environmental Determinism. By the early 1900s, the Industrial Revolution was displaying its immense power to overcome nature. Machines were accomplishing feats that mankind never dreamed possible. Run out of water? Machines can drill deeper or push water through pipes to the area. No food? Food can be shipped in quickly vehicles. Gravity? The airplane. Water currents? Steamboats. Too hot? Air conditioning. Too cold? Heaters. Too dark? The light bulb. People living far apart? Cellular phones. Paul de La Blanche saw these advances as humanity striking against nature, calling his theory Possibilism. Blanche believed that humanity could shape nature, and in turn control its fate.

Do We Have a Solution?

Yet, for all the promise of Possibilism, there are still many critics. If "anything is possible," why are there 1 Billion starving people on the planet? Why do some people have cell phones and the internet, while others are still using stone and animal tools? Why can we not prevent hurricanes or other natural disasters? Why are Antarctica or the Sahara Desert not teeming with human life and advanced cities? While humanity has used machines to overcome a great many challenges, there is still a level of control the earth has over its inhabitants.

Does Geography Determine Destiny?

Env. Determinism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratzel: Env. Determinism - Earth Controls Humans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Much of human hist, controlled success fail. - See: Sub-Saharan Africa, Bhutan vs. USA/Europe 	<div style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> I think I lean determinist #Katrina'05 </div>
Possibilism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejection of Env. Det. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Machines < Earth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Flying, Drilling, Engines, AC - Blanche (Late 1800s): Possibilism - Humans control earth 	
Solution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possib. Critics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Still inequality & uninhabitable land - Natural disasters = unstoppable 	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Just like movie: Cast Away. W/ Industrial Tools = Powerful. Without, vulnerable.... WILSON!!!! </div>
Summary	<p>Q: How much control do humans have over their fate? More w/machines than before.</p> <p>Still vulnerable to nature + inequality.</p>	

Reflection & Example:

Above is an example of what your notes could look like. They do not have to look identical, but should be of a similar spirit. Notes from each paragraph must encapsulate one “big idea” that represents the essence of the paragraph’s first sentence. It is also important to try to pull at least two-to-three important facts, examples, or personal connections. Now close your eyes, and try to recall/retell what the essay was about. Compare what you said to your notes. How did you do?

In this class, the notebook is an important tool. Each student is required to keep a notebook, that will be checked as an assessment. Each section must be assembled in a similar fashion to the examples shown in this section. There must be evidence of each paragraph, along with attempts at building in examples, connections and personal reflections.

Effective reading and note taking are essential components to learning in higher education. It is critical to develop these concepts in a way that works with your brain, helping you to store information and recall it faster. If you are not accustomed to using these strategies, it will take your brain a little while to get used to accessing these new pathways. It will be slow-going. But, once you master these strategies, you will have more success with less time and effort. These skills are transferable to all of your classes will aid in bringing success to all areas of your academic life.

Skill Builder: Conclusion

Success in an AP/College class is determined by the life style that you lead and the study skills you utilize. These skill builder sections have looked at *Time Management, Lifestyle Choices, the Brain/Intelligence, and How to Read and Take Notes*. It is now up to you to put them into practice. The textbook is built with teaching points and reminders to continue to build upon these foundational skills, helping to make these skills an integrated part of your academic reality. As the book progresses, additional skills will be incrementally added to the toolbox, such as how to study, how to take multiple choice tests, how to write papers, and how to write timed essays. All of these skill builders have the aim of training and equipping you to leave the course ready for college.

Intelligence and Success are open to all who are willing to put in the work to achieve them. Remember: life is not about who you are, but who you are becoming. On that journey, don’t forget to be awesome.