

Window Notes

What is it?

A tool that encourages students to use their notes to ask questions, make connections, and explore their personal feelings (in addition to recording facts)

What are the benefits of using this tool?

The ability to take notes is essential to student success. But most students (and most adults) associate notes with boredom, with mindless copying, with things antithetical to curiosity. Window Notes is a note-taking technique that encourages students to unleash their curiosity on the content they are learning about. With Window Notes, students do more than capture information; they can ask questions, make interesting connections, and express their personal feelings and reactions. Not only does this dynamic approach to notes keep student curiosity at the center of learning, it also engages students in the kind of active processing of content that leads to deep understanding.

What are the basic steps?


1. Tell students that you want them to be more curious note takers by generating notes that capture (1) facts, (2) questions, (3) feelings & reactions, and (4) connections that come to mind.
Tip: Encourage students to record *any* connections that come to mind—for example, personal, real-world, literary, historical, or academic (i.e., connections to things they've learned in school).
2. Review the Window Notes organizer (p. 61) with students. Show them how it has a place for each of the four note types mentioned in Step 1, as well as guiding questions to spur their thinking.
3. Model the Window Notes process for students. Select a topic or text, and make all four types of notes about that topic or text on the organizer. Think aloud as you work. Let your curiosity show!
4. Ask students to generate Window Notes about a specific topic, text, lecture, or other classroom presentation. They can use the Window Notes organizer on p. 61, make their own organizers, or express their thoughts orally (ideal for younger students).
Tip: Before having students create content-related Window Notes, let them practice making Window Notes about a topic that's very familiar to them (e.g., a day in their life). Observe students as they work, and provide guidance or feedback as needed.
5. Invite students to share their notes with the class. Review key ideas and address students' questions if appropriate. Instruct students to add to or revise their notes as they see fit.
6. Encourage students to use the Window Notes technique independently, as a means of making the note-taking process more active, engaging, and personally meaningful. Facilitate the process by making blank Window Notes organizers readily available.

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To promote note taking that includes facts, questions, feelings/reactions, and connections
- ✓ To make the note-taking process an active, engaging, and personally meaningful one

EXAMPLE 1: Elementary science

After fourth graders read a passage on penguins, their teacher challenged them to work in teams of four to create a set of collaborative Window Notes. Team members shared and discussed their ideas and then worked together to create their notes. One team's Window Notes appear below.

<p style="text-align: center;">Facts + Summary</p> <p>The visitors of Antarctica are not allowed to touch/hold the penguins.</p> <p>The author learned that one of the larger islands offshore, Litchfield, has a penguin rookery, or nesting area, on the gently sloping western edge.</p> <p>And she also learned the penguin rookery is occupied by 1 or 2 hundred penguins.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Feelings/Reactions</p> <p>I felt really surprised when I saw that it said that penguins carry one stone at a time in their bills.</p> <p>I think the penguins are very cute in the picture.</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;">QUESTIONS</p> <p>Why did the AUTHOR decide to PUBLISH A JOURNAL?</p> <p>How is AN ANTIC ISLAND MADE?</p> <p>Why do PENGUINS ONLY CARRY ONE Pebble?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Connections</p> <p>There is a connection with the story and Happy Feet. The connection is that both have penguin.</p> <p>There is another with the story and Dora: The Explorer because they both are trying to explore.</p>

EXAMPLE 2: Secondary ELA

A high school student's notes from Maya Angelou's "Caged Bird" are shown below.

<p style="text-align: center;">FACTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The poem goes back and forth between a free bird and a caged bird. • The free bird leaps and floats and flies and "claims the sky." • The caged bird's wings are clipped, and its feet are tired. • The poem is written in free verse. 	<p style="text-align: center;">FEELINGS & REACTIONS</p> <p>The poem makes me feel sorry for the caged bird. It can't fly and longs to be free.</p> <p>I really like the way it repeats the verse about the caged bird singing of freedom. The song can't be stopped.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">QUESTIONS</p> <p>Is the caged bird actually triumphant at the end?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">CONNECTIONS</p> <p>The poem reminds me of a technique they sometimes use in movies where they keep cutting back and forth between two different characters.</p>

EXAMPLE 3: Elementary science

Below are the notes a fourth-grade student made while watching a video on tornadoes.

FACTS	FEELINGS & REACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tornadoes are rotating columns of air. They go from a thunderstorm in the sky down to the ground. • They form when warm moist air hits cool dry air. • They can reach wind speeds of 300 miles per hour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tornadoes are really scary! I didn't know how much damage they could cause!
QUESTIONS	CONNECTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they measure the wind speed inside a tornado? • Why don't tornadoes keep going? What makes them stop? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I saw something about a tornado on TV when my parents were watching the news. Some of the people were crying because their houses had gotten blown away. • Tornadoes remind me of getting off to school. I am trying to do so many things and I am so rushed that it feels like I am spinning at 300 miles per hour!

Teacher Talk

- ➔ Because many students aren't used to being asked how they feel, particularly in a note-taking context, you may need to spend more time modeling and discussing what goes in the Feelings & Reactions quadrant of the organizer. One way to help is to give students a list of feeling stems that might help them—for example, "I really enjoyed __," "I was impressed by __," "I was surprised that __," "I was inspired by __," "I was confused about __," or "I'm not sure how I feel about __."
- ➔ While this tool is typically used to have students take notes on one specific text or presentation, it can also be used to help students reflect on and demonstrate what they've learned at the end of a lesson sequence or unit. When used in this way, students' completed organizers serve as a great tool for assessing students' learning, interests, open questions, and feelings about the topic or text.
- ➔ Help yourself (and your students) recognize that people can be curious in different ways by surveying the class to see which of the four note types is each student's favorite. Explain that it's fine to have preferences, but that each note type has value—and, therefore, that students should aim to generate all four types of notes, even if some come less naturally to them.
- ➔ Help students appreciate—and encourage them to use—the Window Notes technique by identifying (or challenging them to identify) the value of each note type. Among other things, you might note that recording FACTS helps students extract and summarize key content, generating QUESTIONS invites students to wonder about the contents, expressing FEELINGS & REACTIONS lets students connect with what they're learning on a personal level, and making CONNECTIONS encourages students to tap into their prior knowledge.
- ➔ Some teachers may wonder if this technique is "fluffy." But, in reality, it promotes deeper understanding than traditional note taking. Why? Because making the four types of notes requires active processing and ensures that students are not simply copying, which can be done mindlessly.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Topic or text: _____

Window Notes

FACTS

What did you learn?

FEELINGS & REACTIONS

How did you feel about what you saw, heard, or read?

QUESTIONS

What do you want to know or wonder about?

CONNECTIONS

Can you make any connections to people, places, or things you know about?
Or to experiences you've had?

