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The Diagram Disconnect: An Examination of Note-Taking Behaviors In College Students

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Abstract

Note-taking in college courses is prevalent yet often ineffective. One potential reason is a disconnect between the information in lectures and that recorded in notes. Whereas science-based lectures frequently include diagrams, students notes often fail to include them. This disconnect likely inhibits learning and may be exacerbated by digital note-taking. We investigated students note-taking during two mini neuroscience lectures and its relation to recall. Students were assigned to diagram presence (diagram embedded in notes for first or second lecture) and note-taking method (typed or handwritten) conditions. Students recalled more in the diagram first condition. There was no recall difference based on note-taking method. Including diagrams in notes for the first lecture likely primed participants to attend to diagrams in the subsequent lecture, helping them realize the importance of the diagram. The lack of a note-taking method effect is inconsistent with past research, but may reflect increasing use of digital note-taking.