

# VISUAL NOTE-TAKING

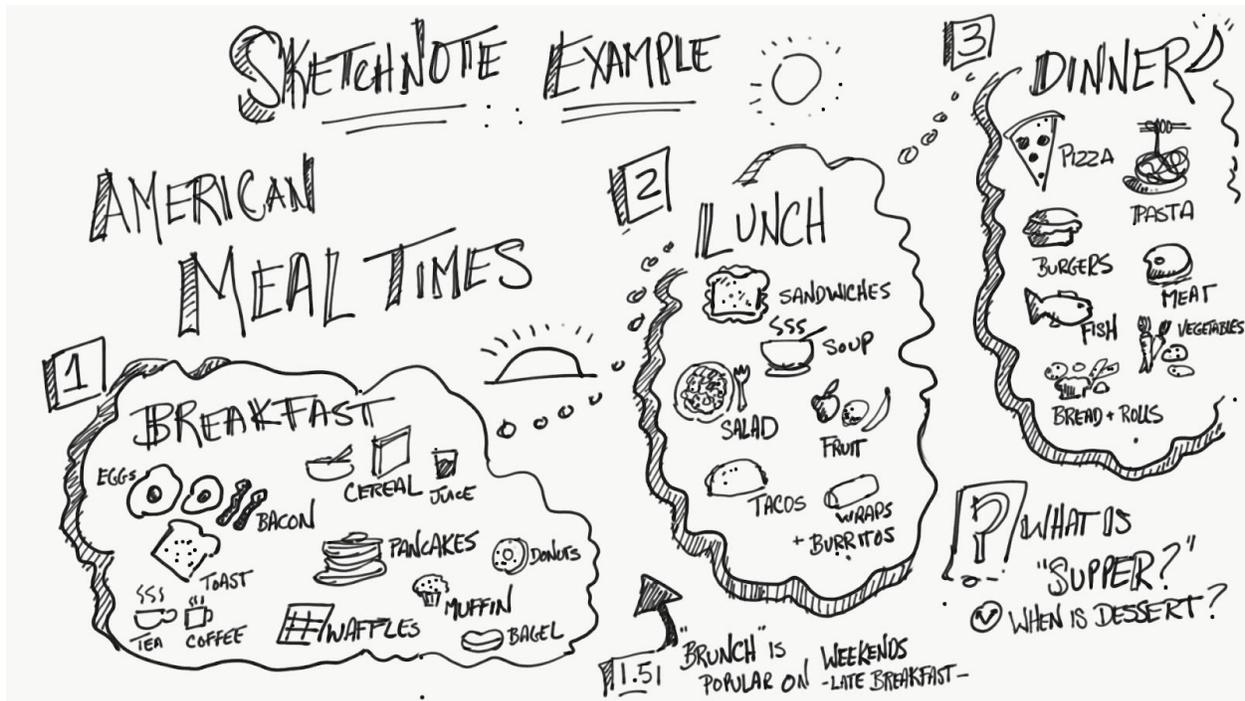


Photo by [Med Badr Chemmaoui](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Our students live in a world of videos and photos, logos and emojis, abbreviations and instant messages. However, most teachers still ask students to take notes by copying words off the board and writing down long passages from textbooks and reference materials. What if students learned to process and organize new information for class in a way more similar to how they communicate in their day-to-day lives? That's what visual note-taking is all about—using a combination of words and images to help make new learning resonate for your students.

Making a transition to visual note-taking can seem like a big shift for both you and your students. This Teacher's Corner provides three visual note-taking strategies that can be applied to any classroom environment and that work well when paired with traditional approaches.

# SKETCHNOTING

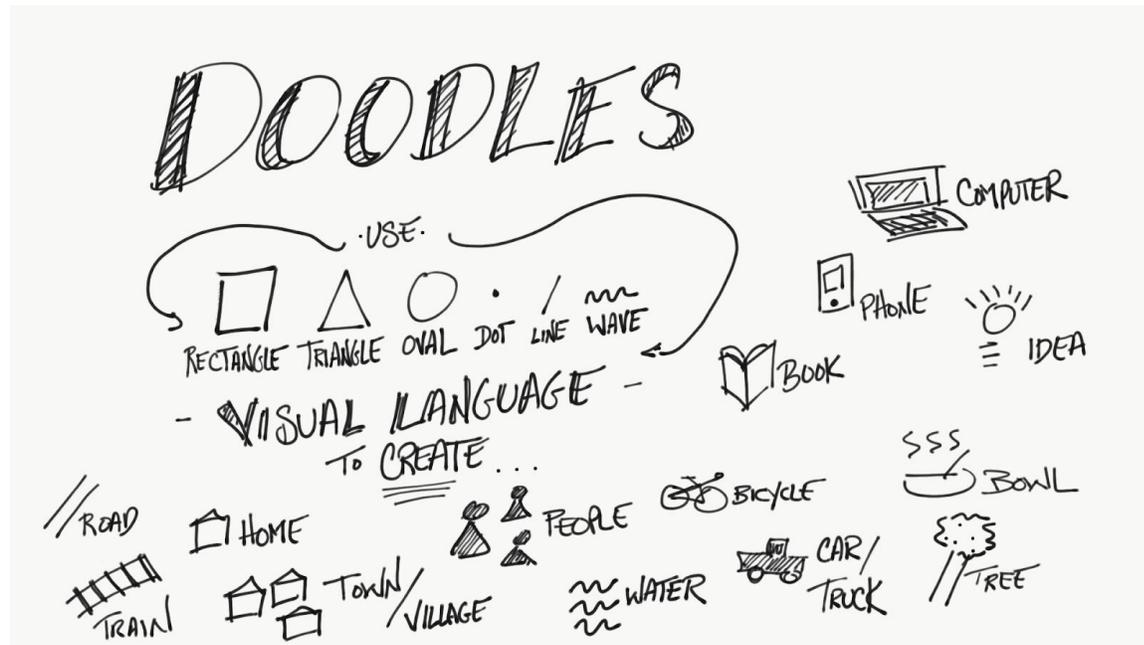
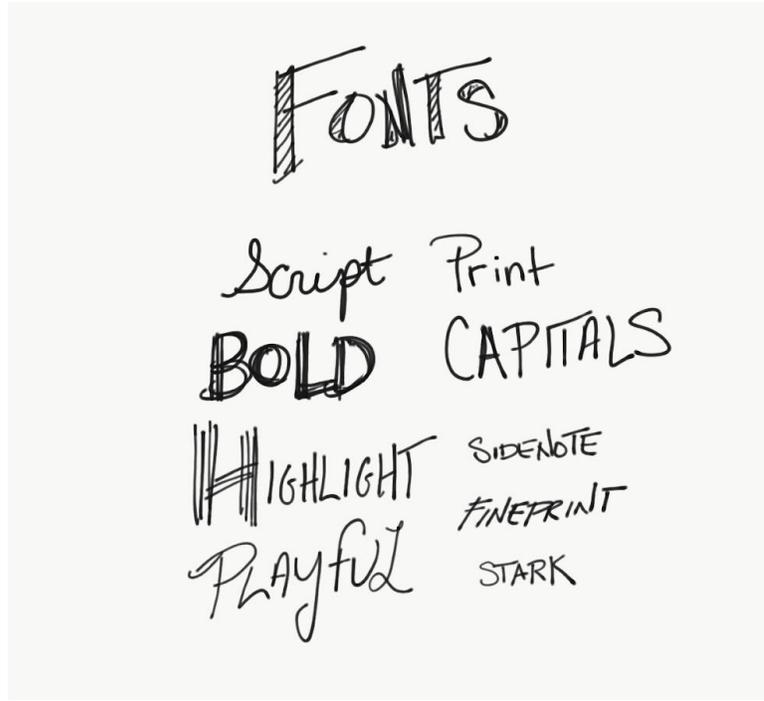


If you search the Internet for examples of visual note-taking, you will see the term “sketchnotes” appear again and again. For many people, sketchnoting and visual note-taking are the same. For our purposes in this article, sketchnoting distinguishes itself from other strategies by being the most flexible and customizable to how an individual student organizes information.

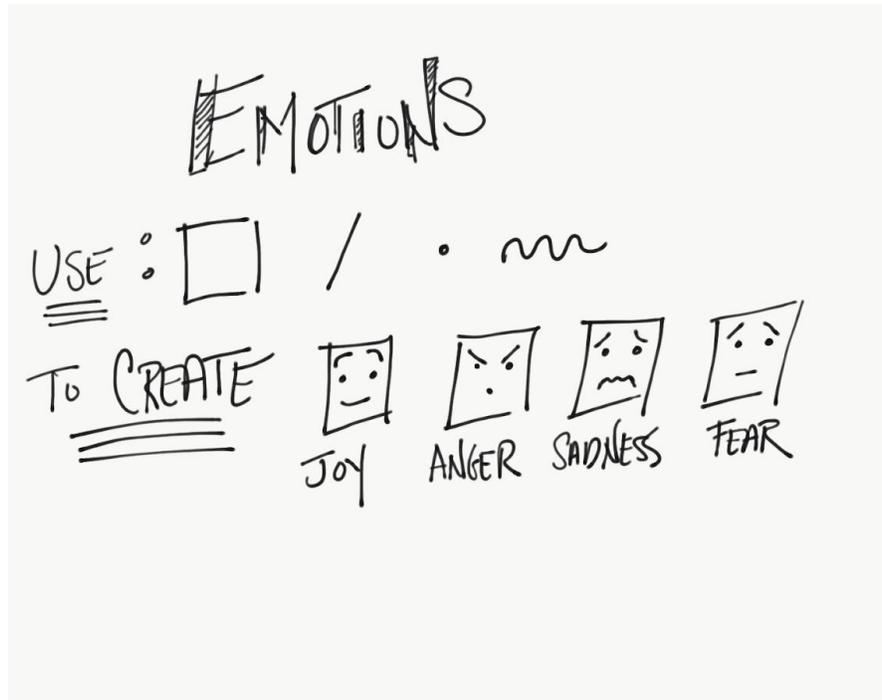
Sketchnotes are best characterized by four common features: fonts, doodles, connectors, and containers.

**Font.** Changing handwriting is one of the simplest ways to distinguish one idea from the next. Using all capitals, shifting from print to script, and adjusting the size of the lettering are all ways students can distinguish one idea from the next.

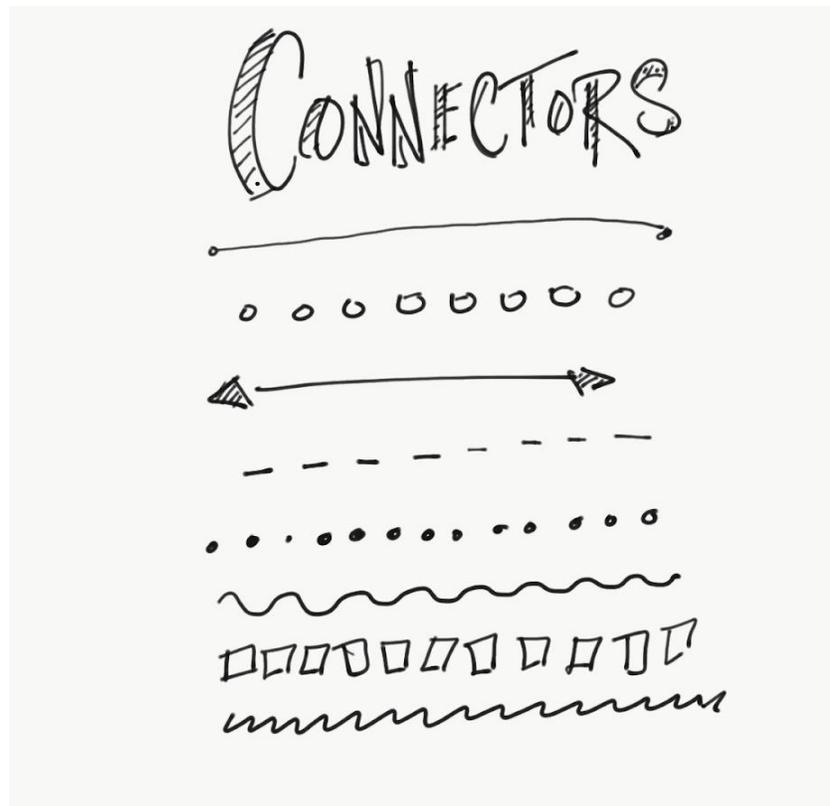
**Doodles.** Students can easily adopt a simple visual language of six shapes: circles, rectangles, triangles, lines, dots, and waves. With these shapes, they can create doodles to represent just about any information, objects, emotions, and ideas they need.



When creating these doodles, it's important to remember that visual note-taking is about communicating ideas, not about creating a piece of art.

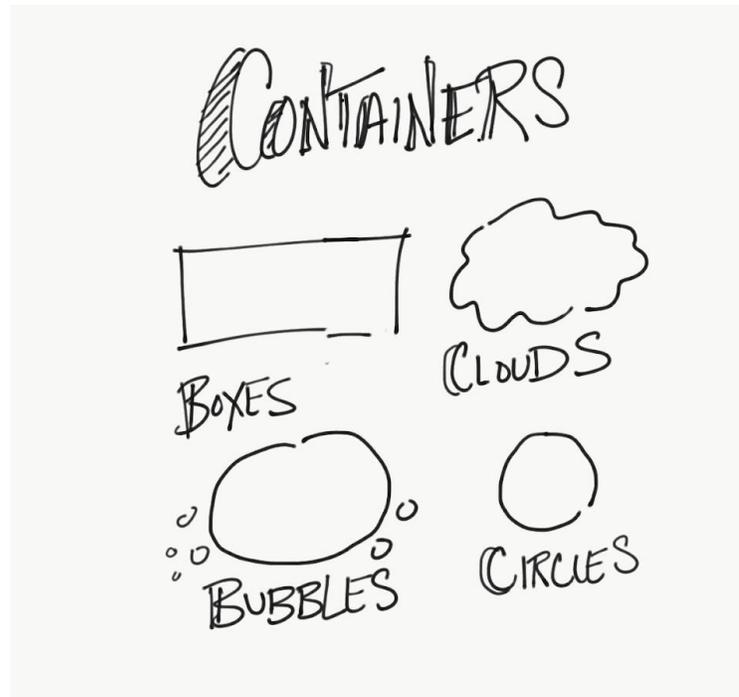


**Connectors.** Thick lines, curved lines, dotted lines, and dashed lines can all be used in sketchnotes to convey meaning and relationships between ideas on the sketchnote. Most sketchnotes use a variety of arrows to illustrate movement, draw attention to important details, and map the ways the student is thinking about the information.

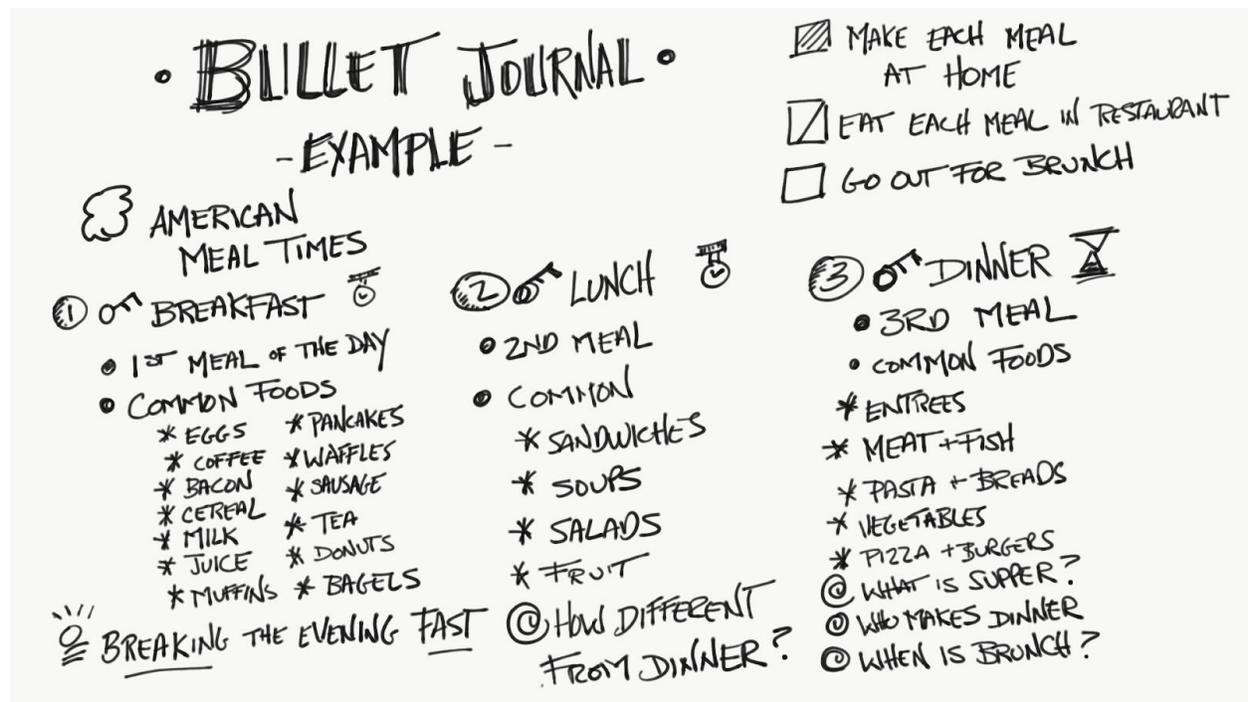


**Containers.** Boxes, circles, clouds, and bubbles all help students group important ideas, steps, facts and figures. Students might create a system to add meaning to each type of container. For example, they might put thoughts they are having about the lesson in a bubble, while putting facts they are learning inside boxes.

When students combine all four of those features into a single sketchnote, they produce powerful ways to remember lessons and information.



## BULLET JOURNALING



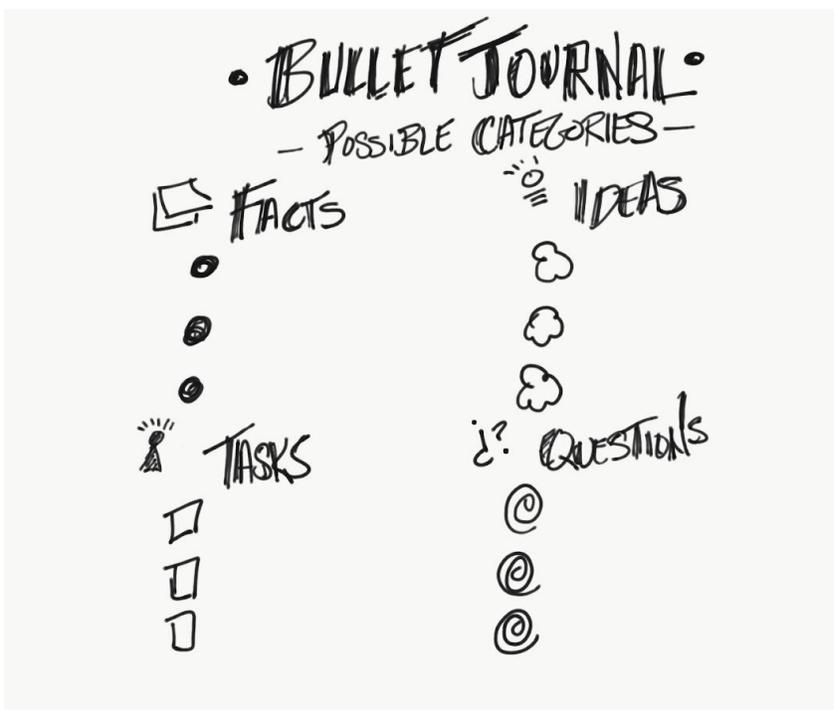
Bullet journaling might be considered a more orderly and straightforward cousin to sketchnotes. The method gets its name from the standard practice of using bullet points (dots, stars, or

boxes) to list information on typed documents. Bullet journaling consists of students making a series of detailed lists and creating a code to help organize and sort the information in those lists.

**Lists.** In terms of note-taking, lists might be of facts or opinions, research to conduct, assessments to complete, people with whom to speak, or places to visit. Lists might be of broad concepts in a text or very specific details of particular importance.

**Coding.** Bullet journals can make it easy to identify the most important pieces of information at a glance while keeping track of questions that the information raises. The coding system helps students track their own progress toward answering those questions and setting new

goals for developing their understanding. Codes might take form of different degrees of shading. For example, when using circles for the bullet points, a fully shadowed circle is a completed task, while a single diagonal line means the task has yet to be started, and several lines suggests a work in progress. In a similar manner, codes may make use of different symbols. A small spiral may indicate the most important idea to remember, while a hashtag (#) indicates the overall theme or concept being discussed.



## BULLET JOURNAL CODES TO TRY

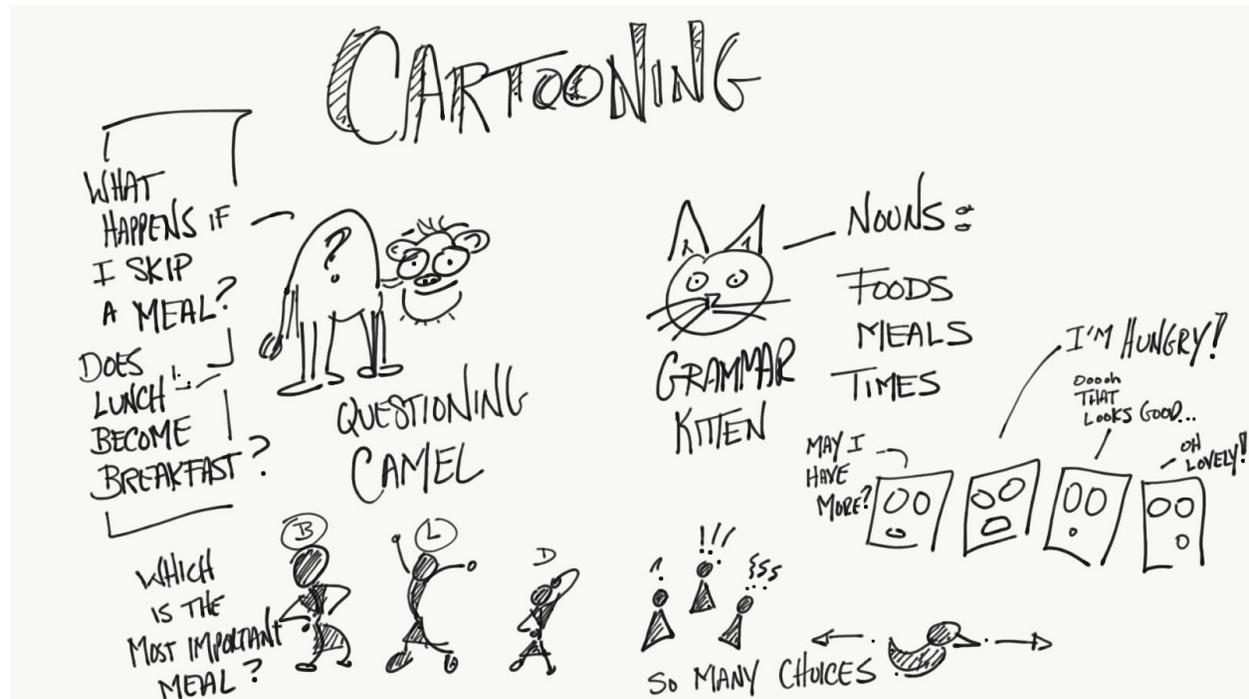
@ QUESTION  
💡 IDEA  
☁ CONCEPT  
🔑 KEY FACT  
① STEP IN A PROCES

□ INCOMPLETE  
▢ STARTED  
▨ ALMOST DONE  
▩ COMPLETE

🕒 QUICK TASK  
⌚ LONG TASK  
📅 VERY LONG TASK  
∞ ONGOING TASK

Students may be encouraged to use a number of pages or notebooks to keep their journaling. It often helps to create space for lists that may grow over time.

## CARTOONING



Cartooning may seem simplistic in light of the other two strategies, but even the act of drawing a cartoon and turning note-taking into storytelling can help students form important connections between new ideas and prior knowledge.

**Characters.** Using the same skills as sketchnoting to create simple doodles as characters, a student can add word balloons and thought balloons to give context to the character's thoughts and considerations. A student might develop a character to use throughout their notes or an entire cast to use for particular purposes for particular types of notes. There might be a grammar kitten and a verb bird, a decision making duck and a question-asking camel. The possibilities are endless, but the goal remains the same.

When students are shown how to take notes using visual methods in combination with traditional print methods, they are more likely to form lasting connections, to make sense of new material by connecting it to their prior knowledge, and be able to access that new information by remembering the creative process of acquiring it, as much as the practical opportunity to use it.

## Next Steps

Please join us as we explore this topic in further depth on the American English for Educators Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators/>). Each week we post something new for you to explore or do. Here is the schedule for this month:

**1st week:** Join our private Facebook group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AETeachersCorner/>. Please answer all three questions completely. You will not be accepted into the group unless you answer the questions.

**2nd week:** Respond to the question prompt that will be posted Monday morning on the AE Teacher's Corner Facebook page.

**3rd week:** Discuss visual note-taking with other group members, using the prompt that will be posted on Monday on the AE Teachers Corner Facebook page.

**4th week:** Browse the list of resources on this topic, which will be posted on the AE Teacher's Corner Facebook page.