

Effective Note-Taking

Lecture styles vary greatly from speaker to speaker. Some lecturers are beautifully organized, some ramble, some present an hour of anecdotes and leave the student to determine their significance. It is imperative that you figure out a lecturer's style. In the case of the rambler or story-teller, you may find yourself at the end of an hour with only a sentence or two written down. Check with other students, but don't be surprised if it works out that your sentences do, indeed, represent the crucial points of the lecture.

Purposes of Note-Taking

1. In order to take efficient notes, the student is forced to listen carefully and critically to what is being said.
2. Taking notes aids comprehension and retention. Personal notes in one's own writing are easier to understand and remember than textbook material.
3. Lecture notes should represent a concise and complete outline of the most important points and ideas, especially those considered most important by the professor.
4. Lecture notes clarify ideas not fully understood in the text or elaborate on things that the text mentions only briefly.
5. Lecture notes combined with notes from textbook material are an excellent source of review. They provide a gauge to what is important in the textbook.

A frequent complaint of students is that they are unable to determine during the lecture what is important and what might just as well be left out. These students may attempt to write down every word uttered by the professor, combining page after page of isolated facts and details but missing a more general understanding of the material, as they are too busy writing to listen. The following are some suggestions to aid the student in taking efficient lecture notes.

Before the Lecture

The single most important thing you can do is to read or skim the text prior to attending the lecture. This will enable you to:

1. Get the general overview of main ideas, secondary points, and important concepts. Listen with understanding and determine what is relevant and irrelevant.
2. Identify familiar terms with unfamiliar terms and concepts. Look up terms BEFORE class, and write the terms and definitions on note cards. Take the note cards to class and use them as a reference tool during the lecture. Listen for an explanation of concepts. Ask for clarification if needed.
3. Note portions of the material which are unclear. Listen for an explanation during the lecture. Write down questions to ask in class. 4. Look for other gaps in information which should be clarified or filled in.

During the Lecture

Structure and Organization

Each student should develop his own method of taking notes, however, the following suggestions may be helpful.

1. Keep a separate section of your notebook for each course.
2. Notes for each lecture should begin on a new page.
3. Date your lecture notes and number all pages.
4. Make your notes brief. Avoid sentences. Use abbreviations.
5. Note exactly: a formula, a definition, a specific fact

6. Try to find the lecturer's pattern: summarizing text, drawing relationships, examples, analysis
7. Don't worry about outlining. Use indentations or skip lines to distinguish between major and minor points.
8. If you miss something completely, leave a blank space and get it later.
9. Underline unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts so you can return to it later.
10. Use margins for questions and comments.
11. Develop a code system to interpret your notes. ?-not clear during lecture, !-important, Q-question, *-assignment, C-student comment
12. Attempt to differentiate fact from opinion

Content

1. Include all main ideas and subordinate points to clarify understanding.
2. Rules, definitions, and examples should be clear and specific.
3. Instructors usually give clues as to what is important. Look for previews, summaries, visual aids, repetition, vocal emphasis.
4. Instructor's word clues include: four causes of, therefore, in conclusion, and so we see, hence, on the other hand, however, cause-effect, relationships, etc

After the Lecture

1. Go over your notes as soon as possible after the lecture. Immediate review is essential to retention. Unless you review within 24 hours after lecture or at least before the next lecture, retention will drop sharply and you will be relearning rather than reviewing.
2. Merely recopying notes without thinking about or revising them does not necessarily aid retention. A more helpful practice is to manipulate the material by reorganizing it and putting it in your own words. For a well-organized lecture, an outline can suffice, but in the case of material where important ideas and relationships are scattered throughout, there is a technique called mapping which can be very useful in restructuring and putting together the relevant points. The use of this technique forces you to critically evaluate material in terms of main ideas, secondary points, and details, and to structure this content in an organized and coherent fashion. Relationships must be observed and established, irrelevant material may be excluded. This can be one of the most efficient means of immediate review for optimal retention.