

Taking Good Notes in Lectures

Why take notes? There are three basic reasons: to learn, for reference, and to keep you thinking. But taking good lecture notes isn't easy. Good lecture notes must summarize the main points, include the important ideas in your own words, and list the specific details needed for your purpose in this class. To be successful, you must make what you hear part of your own thinking.

Be Prepared To Take Good Notes

Understanding a lecture and taking good notes from it will be easier if you have prepared before you go to class. You should read all assignments listed in the syllabus and given by your instructor. In addition, you should review your notes from the previous class session and any handouts. Finally, you should determine what your purpose is for this class session so you will be able to take the notes you need to fulfill your purpose.

Know Your Instructor's Style

Does your instructor: 1) simply review the text, page by page, 2) use the text as a basis for lecture but add information from other sources, or 3) assign you to read the text—expecting you to read it on your own—and lecture from other sources? It's possible that your instructor will use a combination of these approaches during a semester, but your awareness of where lecture material is coming from is your first step in taking good notes.

Also consider the way an instructor organizes and delivers information. If you have an instructor start a class with, "Today we will discuss the three basic views of..." use that as a key to organize your notes as you take them. If, on the other hand, your instructor begins with an anecdote or some other illustrative material, you will have to write down ideas in the order the instructor delivers them and then spend time organizing them after class. Stay alert for cues your instructor gives you, such as changing voice pitch, rate or tone; writing information on the board; and using audiovisual material such as transparencies or computer presentations.

Understand What You Write

Don't try to be a human tape recorder—trying to write a complete transcript of the class is not good notetaking. Your notes should capture the main points and only those details you need for this specific purpose.

Your notes should be simple and in your own words whenever possible. Aside from complex concepts or specific formulas that you must memorize and therefore need to write/copy, always translate ideas into your own words. Include supplemental and text references your instructor gives; the additional readings will help you clarify your notes and the concepts that are covered.

Take Your Notes The Same Way

Use standard 8 ½ x 11 lined notebook paper. Title it with class, date, and whatever other information is needed to distinguish the notes you take in this class today from any other notes. Devise and use your own shorthand to make notetaking easier and stick to it. Remember that each note must be complete enough to be intelligible later. If you miss information, leave a blank spot in your notes and ask after class. Don't crowd information together. Leave room for extra information and put only one idea or item on a line.

Make Notes On Your Notes

Right after class, spend 5 – 10 minutes editing your notes. Fill in missing information, clarify abbreviations, and expand details. Annotate your notes—write key words in the margins:

1. Leave a 2-inch margin at the left side of each page of notes. Do not write in this margin while you are taking notes.

2. After you have edited your notes, annotate in the left margin with words, phrases, or questions that briefly summarize major points. These key ideas should also trigger your memory to help you recall the complete information.
3. To study, cover the lecture notes and look only at your annotations. Read the annotation and recall the information in your notes. Slide the cover and check yourself.

For Lecture Notes

Annotating with Key Words

Melissa Student College Study Skills October 15 Page 1 See page 45 in textbook		} Standard Notes Heading	
Taking Notes From Lectures			} Lecture Topic
	My notes have to-		
Key Idea {	3 Things Good Notes Must Do	*1. Summarize main pts 2. List imp't ideas in my own words 3. Include significant details needed for this class	} Lecture Notes
	Prepare To Take Notes	• Read text assgnmt before going to class • Read last class session notes and handouts • Predict topics for this lecture	
	Instructor Style	To organize my notes I must know if the instructor: • Reviews text pg by pg? • Uses text as base but adds info from other sources? • Requires that I read text-lectures from other sources?	
Key Idea {	4 Teacher Cues	How a teacher can signal imp't info 1. Changing voice pitch, rhythm, tone 2. Writing info on board 3. Using A-V materials-transparencies, etc. 4. Telling class directly that info is imp't	} Consistent Abbreviations