

Note Taking Strategies

Taking notes encourages a more active thinking part in the lectures. Reorganizing or editing notes can help with integrating course information into long-term retention.

After the first few sessions of class, decide whether you can record the content easily or not. Things about the instructor (speaking rate), the room (background noise), or yourself (challenging/unfamiliar subject) may cause difficulties in note-taking. If that is your situation, focus on getting as much information down as possible without an attempt to organize it. Asking a classmate to share in the note-taking process may help to ensure that you have captured the key information. Spend time, as soon after the lecture as possible, reorganizing the information.

If getting the content down is not a problem, then you can focus on the best form and structure to promote understanding.

Lecture Goals

Try to define the instructor's goal for their lectures. In some courses, especially introductory courses, delivering a body of knowledge is the goal. In others, comparative viewpoints may be criticized; controversial issues may be discussed; research may be presented; or theoretical brainstorming may be emphasized. You should also try to recognize where the lecture content comes from so that you can later check and clarify information. Some lectures will directly follow the course textbook while others will use material from supplemental sources or personal experiences.

Lecture Format

Most lectures include an introduction, a thesis statement to identify the day's topic, a body of content about the topic, a summary statement, and a certain number of irrelevancies. The body of the content is generally organized around one of the following formats:

- **Inductive:** begins with a small fact, building upon that to a major conclusion
- **Deductive:** starts with a major point and gradually transitions to the smallest fact
- **Chronological:** presents content from earliest to the most recent
- **Spatial:** uses a diagram, map or picture to guide the direction of the lecture

- **Logical:** follows some sequence of events or steps in an evolutionary manner
- **Topical:** presents several content areas with no apparent connection

Before, During and After the Lecture

Before

- Complete readings and assignments before class to help identify main concepts that likely will be discussed during the lecture.
- Consider preparing a list of questions. Listening for answers to your questions can help you actively engage with the lecture.
- Look at the course syllabus to help identify the focus of the lecture.
- Arrive early and review your notes from the previous class. A quick review helps with concept retention and current lecture preparation.
- Know what note taking form you are going to use. Be consistent with your note structure.

During

- Sit in the front of the classroom. Make eye contact with the instructor when possible. Concentrate on what is being said. Participate in class discussions.
- Put the notes in your words. Do more listening, thinking and less writing if you understand the material.
- Focus on writing the main ideas and key points. Listen for cues to main ideas such as transition expressions, repetitions, voice reflections, gestures, or summaries.
- Use abbreviations to help capture all key points.
- Note questions you have that you want to follow-up on later.
- Leave a blank space in your notes if you missed information. You can fill in the information later by talking with another student or from the instructor.

After

- Review your notes and rewrite them adding relevant details.
- Ask a classmate or the instructor for help if you missed details.
- Highlight, underline, and use checkmarks (sparingly) to signify important areas.

Tip: Write practice test questions while reading and reviewing your notes. If you create questions as you go, you will have a 'practice test' ready to use to study for the exam.