

HOW TO TAKE GREAT NOTES

Before the Class

1. Prepare for the class so that you will be more likely to predict the organization of the lecture. **Check the course outline** to see if the instructor has listed the topic or key ideas in the upcoming lecture. If so, convert this information into questions to be answered in the lecture.
2. **Before the lecture**, complete outside reading or reference assignments.
3. **Review the text assignment** and any reading notes taken.
4. **Review notes** from the previous lecture.

Have a proper attitude. Listening well is a matter of paying close attention. Be prepared to be open-minded about what the lecturer may be saying, even though you may disagree with it.

During the Class

1. Have your paper and pencil or pen ready. The last thing you want to do is have your pen run out of ink, or your pencil break, without a backup ready.
2. Write down the topic or title of the lecture and the date.
3. Listen carefully to the introduction (if there is one). By knowing this outline, you will be better prepared to anticipate what notes you will need to take. Decipher this outline by listening for:
 - A topic for each section.
 - Supporting points or examples for the topic.
4. Copy what's written on the blackboard and transparencies, especially the outline. To make sure that you get everything, get in the habit of skipping words like "the" and "a" and make use of shorthand and abbreviations. Summarize your notes in your own words, not the instructor's. Remember: your goal is to understand what the professor is saying, not to try to record, exactly, everything he or she says.
5. Recognize main ideas by signal words that indicate something important is to follow. See the tip on signals below.
6. Jot down details or examples that support the main ideas. Take down examples and sketches which the lecturer presents. Indicate examples with "e.g." Give special attention to details not covered in the textbook.
7. If there is a summary at the end of the lecture, pay close attention to it. You can use it to check the organization of your notes. If your notes seem disorganized, copy down the main points that are covered in the summary. It will help in revising your notes later.
8. At the end of the lecture (or DURING if the instructor is agreeable), ask questions about points that you did not understand.

After the Class

1. Revise your notes as quickly as possible after the class, since at that time you will still remember a good deal of the lecture.
2. During the first review period after the class, coordinate reading and lecture notes.
3. Review your class notes at least once a week. Also, review the class notes before the next lecture.

Tips

- Collect notes for each course in one place, in a separate notebook or section of a notebook.
- Use a loose-leaf notebook rather than a notebook with a permanent binding. See the pattern of a lecture by spreading out the pages.
- Use two pieces of paper, one as a draft, and one as your final notes.
- Enter your notes legibly because it saves time. Make them clear.
- Box assignments and suggested books so you can identify them quickly.
- Mark ideas which the lecture emphasizes with an arrow or some special symbol.
- When the teacher looks at his/her notes, pay attention to what they say next.
- Trade your "draft" notes with a classmate after each lecture. A scanner and email works great for passing these notes.
- Incorporate different colors of ink, diagrams, drawings of your own. Make your notes *your* notes. Take advantage of how you learn (visually, orally, or actively) and write/draw your notes according to that style.
- Watch for signal words. Your instructor is not going to send up a rocket when he/she states an important new idea or gives an example, but she will use signals to telegraph what she is doing. Every good speaker does it, and you should expect to receive these signals.
- Consider splitting the page into two columns -- keep lecture notes on one side, and write questions that come up during the lecture on the other side. This will ensure that you don't forget any unclear points or questions that come up during the lecture, and will enable you to associate the answer with the relevant material when you find it later. Also, if you go to office hours, your professor will notice that you were paying attention in class, which will pay off in the long run.
- Consider buying a cheap tape recorder. Take in consideration the recording range of the hardware (on the package), the length of tape and the lecture, how big the lecture hall is, and how far away you will be from the lecturer. Remember to ask permission before taping your professor (or anyone!) Most teachers are delighted to have a student who takes that much interest in their subject.
- Most newer micro recorders will record to internal memory in a PC-friendly audio format (like MP3, WMA, etc). You can be the class hero by transferring these to your PC and then uploading them to your personal web page or MySpace page. Use a descriptive title when naming the files to stay organized (include date of class, professor and class subject code).

Warnings

- Do not perform manual activities which will detract from taking notes. Do not doodle or play with your pen. These activities break eye contact and concentration.
- If you are gathering together your personal belongings when you should be listening, you're bound to miss an important point--perhaps an announcement about the next exam--or, at the least, insult the professor.

Most importantly... USE COMMON SENSE AND GOOD JUDGEMENT!!!