

A Simple Guide to Taking Effective Study Notes

Taking effective notes in lectures and tutorials is an essential skill for university study. Note-taking is very important because:

- Good note taking allows a permanent record of key information.
- You can integrate notes you take with your own writing, and use for exam revision.
- Taking reliable, accurate notes also reduces the risk of plagiarizing.
- Note-taking helps you distinguish where your ideas came from and how and what you think about those ideas.

Six Reasons to Take Notes:

- Notes are useful record of key information and the sources of that information.
- Notes inscribe information kinesthetically and help you remember what you heard.
- Taking notes helps you to concentrate and listen effectively.
- Taking notes increases your understanding.
- Notes create a resource for exam preparation.
- Notes taken in classes often contain information that can't be found elsewhere.

Before the Lecture:

Preparation before the lecture provides the background knowledge you need to be an effective listener and an effective student.

- Know what the lecture will be about.
- Check the course outline for weekly topics.
- Do any required pre-reading.
- If lecture slides are available before class, download them.
- Review notes from previous lectures.
- Set up notebooks, documents for note-taking.
- Arrive on time and sit near the front. In order to take good notes you need to hear and see clearly.

During the Lecture:

- Arrive prepared to actively listen and learn, and to think critically.
- Analyzing and questioning the information helps you to focus and understand what you hear.
- Don't try to write down everything being said.
- Be selective; recognize key concepts identifying and selecting what is relevant. Listen for the overall argument and note the main points and key information.

How Can You Recognize What is Important?

Distinguish between main points, elaboration, examples, and new points by listening for:

- **Introducing remarks:** Lectures often start with an overview of the key ideas or themes of a particular topic.
- **Verbal "signposts":** They indicate something important is about to be said.
- **Repeated points:** Important points will often be repeated, especially in introductions and conclusions.
- **Phonological cues:** Voice emphasis, change in volumes, speed, emotions and emphasis) often indicate important information.
- **Final remarks:** Most lectures conclude with a summery, a restatement of the main ideas and an indication of how the topic connects with upcoming material.

Look for:

- None verbal cues (facial expressions hand and body signals) that indicates that something important is being said.
- Visual cues (note what is on the visuals, note references to names and sources).

After the Lecture:

To get the most out of your notes, it is important to review and re-engage actively with them several times.

1. Reviewing the Notes:

- Review your notes while the lecture is fresh in your mind.
- Reviewing helps you remember what was said, builds up your understanding and helps identify gaps in your knowledge.

How to Review Your Notes:

Read through your notes to:

- Make sure they are clear and legible.
- Clean them up.
- Fix spelling errors.
- Expand on abbreviations.
- Tidy up handwriting.
- Fill in the missing words or information and add anything extra that you may have thought of since the lecture.
- Code your notes, use color and symbols to make structure and emphasis, highlight major sections, main points and diagrams.
- Use different colors to emphasis main points; classify different topics and link concepts or information.
- Identify anything that needs further clarification.

2. Re-engaging with the Notes:

- Try to "chunking" similar pieces of information into categories that you can remember more easily.
- Transcribe your own questions to the notes to help you recall the key ideas
- Write a brief overall summary of the notes.
- Reflect on the learning process itself. What do you find confusing? How did you solve problems or clarify your understanding.

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