

ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTER

STUDY SKILLS LIBRARY

Lecture Note Taking

Discussion

Notes provide a record of the lecture content. They should help you to learn and remember the ideas and facts presented. Reorganized or edited notes may form the basis for integrating all course materials and information. This may help to reduce cramming and going over great masses of unlearned materials at the close of the quarter.

Notes should also represent your understanding of the content. They should encourage you to take an active thinking part in the lecture and to do reference reading. Notes may also represent your questions and reactions. If notes are used in the ways suggested, they may help you overcome nervousness and fear of examinations through more thorough learning and preparation.

The Content of Lecture Material

Instructors have different ideas about what "Learning" in their lectures should include. An introductory nature, getting a body of knowledge is a chief aim. In others, comparative viewpoints may be criticized, controversial issues may be discussed, research may be presented, or theoretical brainstorming may be emphasized. It is important that you try to define the instructor's aim since it will help you to focus on the material.

You should also try to recognize where the lecture content comes from so that you can later check and clarify information. Some lecturers will directly follow the course textbook while others will use material from supplemental sources or personal experiences.

Knowing the degree of detail or generalization will help to plan the actual recording on content. Some instructors may cover only a few points with much explanation to make them clear but not necessarily important to the actual notes. Others may pack the lecture hour with facts, leaving you to determine the major points.

The Lecture Format

Most lectures include an introduction to get your attention, a thesis statement to tell what the day's topic will be, a body of content about the topic, a summary statement, and a certain number of irrelevancies. The body of the content is generally organized round one of the following formats:

1. **Inductive** – begins with a small fact, building upon that to a major conclusion.
2. **Deductive** – starts with a major point and gradually defends that point down to the smallest fact.
3. **Chronological** – organized according to time, often earliest to most recent.
4. **Spatial** – uses diagrams, maps, or pictures to guide the direction of the lecture.
5. **Logical** – follows some sequence of events or steps in an evolutionary manner.

6. **Topical** – presents several content areas with no apparent connection.

Most instructors have a typical pattern which they follow in their lectures. If you can recognize this pattern, you will be able to listen and structure your notes more effectively. Both thinking and writing will be more clearly organized.

For each class you will need a different note taking system. Because the combinations of factors about you, the instructor, the classroom conditions and the task vary constantly, your strategies for one class will rarely be exactly the same as for another.

Note Taking Before, During, and After Class

Before Class:

Review yesterday's notes and edit them. Think about what may be presented today. Study today's lesson, text, or readings. Survey or preview the next lesson.

During Class:

Actively participate

1. Do more listening and thinking, and less writing if you understand the material.
2. Watch for verbal, visual, or postural clues, which indicate main points. Examples: voice inflections, material on board, repetitions, gestures.
3. Ask questions or write them down for further clarification when you disagree or are unsure.
4. Sit in front of the classroom if you have difficulty concentrating. Maintain eye contact with the instructor when possible.
5. Have a system of taking notes.

After Class:

Edit your notes as soon as possible -- the sooner you do so, the less you will forget. Do the following:

A. Reorganize notes:

1. Number, label or underline to stress major and minor points.
2. Take out repetitions or irrelevancies.
3. Add or clarify where needed.
4. Code the margins with key topics.
5. Reduce notes.

B. Set notes up for review:

1. Write summary statements.
2. Turn major headings into questions to use in selective reviewing.
3. Mark points you expect will be included on the test.
4. Write possible questions over the material given.

Bibliography

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