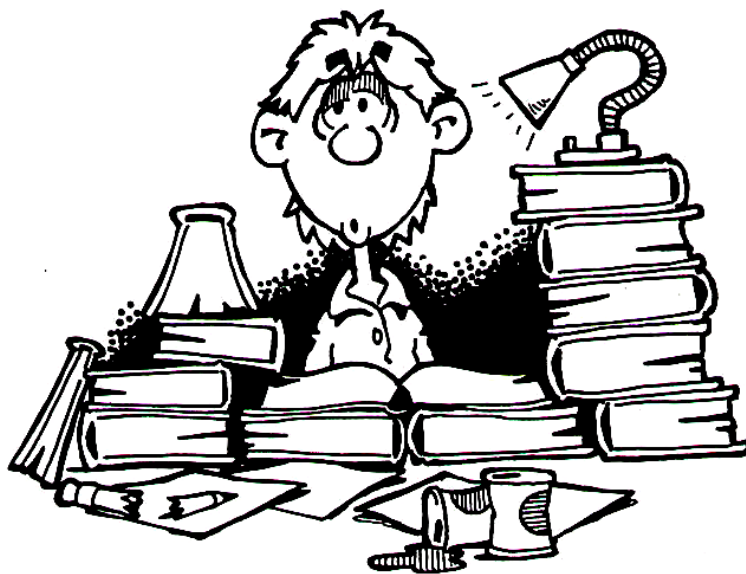


NOTE-TAKING FOR UNIVERSITY



"Learn how to listen and you will prosper even from those who talk badly."

- Plutarch (AD 46-120) Greek Biographer & Philosopher

Note Taking Inventory

Self Assessment Exercise:

Consider the following statements and place a check (✓) beside the ones that are true. If you have any additional comments, write them in the spaces below.

1. ____ I usually take notes, but not with much care.
2. ____ I write down as much content as possible in any lecture that I attend.
3. ____ I seldom reread my notes after the lecture.
4. ____ My notes are never as clear as I would like them to be.
5. ____ Some lecturers are almost impossible to follow well enough to take decent notes.
6. ____ My notes aren't consistent.
7. ____ I don't always know why I write down the things that I write.
8. ____ I have trouble listening while taking notes
9. ____ I find it hard to see and hear well from where I sit in the lecture hall.
10. ____ If I concentrate on the main ideas, I find that I miss other important facts.
11. ____ I catch myself daydreaming often in lectures that are not very interesting.

Strategies for Effective Listening in Lectures

→ **Adopt a Listening Posture:**

Although our physical posture is important, a 'Listening Posture' refers to our attitude when it comes to listening during lectures.

1. Try to find areas of interest in each lecture
 - Topic may be dry, but try not to tune out
 - Seize the opportunity. Ask yourself, "What's in it for me?"
2. Try to judge the content, not the professor's delivery
3. Listen first, shoot later
 - Don't be too quick to argue against what the professor is saying
 - Critical thinking is important, but listen to what the professor is asking and try to understand before creating an argument
 - Hold back judgment until you comprehend
4. Listening is hard work - be prepared to put the effort in
 - Exercise your mind - put mental energy into trying to understand what the professor is saying
5. Keep an open mind
 - Many words or phrases a professor uses can be emotionally loaded words (ie. left-wing, right-wing, fundamentalist, Christian, abortion, pro-life, feminist, etc.)
 - Try not to get hung up and caught up with reacting to these words

→ **Before the Lecture:**

1. Read Ahead:
 - Survey the text before the lecture in order to recognize new ideas and vocabulary
2. Go to class intending to listen and learn:
 - Take responsibility for learning from the lecture
 - Avoid distracting classmates
3. Try to sit in a place where you can focus:
 - Try to sit in the front where you can maintain your focus on the instructor and see and hear as well as possible
 - Your eyes won't wander towards distractions
 - Your instructor will think you are a keener

4. Do a quick review:

- Look at your notes from the previous class to refresh your memory
- Reviewing notes will help you to make connections with the previous class

5. Check course outlines:

- This is a good way to keep track of the sequence of topics

6. Manage your time and energy levels:

- Try to manage your time in a way that you go to class with as much mental energy as you can, which will aid in concentration

→ **During the Lecture:**

1. Listen for signals and cues:

- The professor may give cognitive clues that indicate the emerging structure
- Words that indicate:

Examples	- to illustrate, for example, for instance
Time	- before, after, formerly, prior, meanwhile
Addition	- furthermore, moreover, also
Cause and Effect	- therefore, as a result, if...then, this, so
Contrast	- on the other hand, on the contrary, conversely
Enumeration	- the following, first, firstly, next, finally
Emphasis	- more importantly, above all, remember this
Repetition	- in other words, that is to say, in essence
Summary	- in a nutshell, to sum up, in conclusion
Test Items	- this is vital, remember this, you'll see this again

2. Learn to separate the essential from the non-essential

3. Study the instructor:

- Watching for cues can help you decipher between main ideas and supporting information
- Listen for verbal cues - voice, pauses, repetitions, slowing down, raising voice, lowering voice, saying things like "I believe the following is important"
- Note non-verbal cues - Not important = gazing out the window
 - Important = writing on the overhead, eye contact, dramatic gestures
 - **Be careful:** non-verbal cues can be ambiguous

4. Watch for Emphasis:
 - Emphasized words and concepts are likely to appear on the exam
5. Listen for Ideas:
 - Good listeners listen for the central themes and concepts; don't get hung up on facts
6. Fight to avoid distractions
7. Record examples:
 - Write down all examples or statistics the professor writes down; they are there for a reason
8. Pay attention to organization:
 - Pay attention to the way the instructor has organized the material
 - If it is not well structured try to organize it yourself
9. Be aware of your general knowledge:
 - Try to associate your general knowledge of the topic with this new information to give it more meaning and enhance memory
10. Ask for clarification:
 - If you don't understand a point, ask!
 - Get over the intimidation and fear of what people will think about your questions; many probably have the same question you do
 - Remember, you are paying a lot for this education! Get your money's worth!
11. Pay attention:
 - Be aware that by the middle of the lecture your attention may lapse
12. Try to avoid writing things down that you already know
13. Thought is faster than speech:
 - Some professors speak very slowly, so use the time wisely
 - Challenge what is being said
 - Anticipate where the professor is going next
 - Mentally summarize what was just said
 - Weight the evidence
 - Apply what has been said
 - Connect what was said with something you already know

Discerning What is Important to Record in Your Notes

Lectures can be overwhelming and result in cases of 'Information Overload', making note-taking an almost impossible task. By identifying the purpose of the lecture, nature of exams and studying the professor, distinguishing the important points from the supplementary information will be easier and the task of note-taking less overwhelming.

Things to think about:

→ What is the purpose of the lectures in this course?

Discerning the purpose of the lectures will influence your approach to note taking.

- Lectures can be the main source of information on which the exam will be based
- Lectures can be to highlight/elaborate on the text
- Lectures can be to elaborate on printed notes that your professor has handed out or posted online
- Lectures can be a discussion on readings you were to do before class

→ What will be the relationship between the lectures and the exam?

Will the exam cover the lectures or not? If so, organized note taking is crucial.

→ What will be the nature of the exam?

Knowing the nature of the exam will influence what you record in your notes, and your notes should set you up for your exam prep review.

- Multiple Choice - you may need a fair amount of details
- Short Answer - you may be required to provide definitions
- Essay - you will need to have main points, themes and be able to relate them to other material

→ Check the course outline

There may be clues as to what is important; learning objectives should be recorded.

→ The first lecture is key

This lecture may hint to what is most important in the course.

→ Listen for the TAC of the lecture

Listening for the TAC can help you discern what is most important to record and will provide some organization for your notes

- Thesis - the central point; everything is aimed at proving this idea
- Arguments - taken together, these arguments prove the thesis
- Conclusion - summarizes the entire argument and may suggest new avenues for enquiry

- **Take notes on what you *don't* know**
Record the information and concepts that are new and unfamiliar. You may decide you don't need to write down what you are already familiar with which can save time.
- **Repetition of topic or points**
Repetition can indicate that something is very important and worth noting.
- **Study the instructor**
Signals from the instructor will help you to discern between main ideas and supporting information.
 - Listen for verbal cues
 - Note non-verbal cues
- **Watch for emphasized words and concepts**
These emphasized points will likely be on the exam.
- **Try to record key terms**
Get down brief definitions and explanations of key terms for later review (people, places, dates, theories, and concepts)
- **Using illustrations or examples to explain a point**
If the professor is taking great effort to make sure you understand something by illustrating and giving examples, it may suggest that the point in question is critical.
- **The amount of time spent on a point may suggest it is important**
- **Changing the style of the presentation**
Moving from lecture to discussion or questions may suggest the point is important.
- **Ask a previous student**
Students who have had your professor before will likely know how to tell when the professor is saying something important.
- **Pay attention to the beginning and end of a lecture**
Professors will often make key points, either as review or wrap-up.

Helpful Abbreviations

Some helpful time-saving abbreviations that would be useful in lectures:

Symbols:

.		!	Important point
. .	Therefore	!!	Very Important Point
b/c	Because	*	May be on exam
↑	Increase	**	Will be on Exam
↓	Decrease	?	May not understand
=	Equal	??	Definitely do not understand
→	Is related to	X	I disagree
+	And, in addition to	≈	Approximately
vs	Compares to, verses	w/	With
»	As a result of	w/i	Within
w/b	Will be	w/o	Without
ff	Following	wh/	Which
△	Change	cf	Compare
&	And	<	Less than
. . .	And so on	>	Greater than
b/w	Between	≠	Does not equal
@	At	◦	Degree
s/b	Should be	⊖	Negative
c/b	Could be	⊕	Positive
B4	Before		

Short Abbreviations:

Definition = def.

That is to say = ie.

Point = pt.

Mechanism = mech.

Especially = esp.

Evidence = evid.

Function = fxn

Psychology = psych

Example = eg.

Input = inp.

Reaction = rxn

Sociology = soc.

First Syllable:

Politics = pol

Capitalism = cap

Democracy = dem

Represents = rep

Liberal = lib

Contrast = con

First Syllable, Second Letter:

Subject = subj

Individual = ind

Conservative = cons

Totalitarianism = tot

Eliminate Final Letters:

Association = assoc

Achievement = ach

Biological = bio

Omit Vowels:

Background = bkgd

Enough = enf

Government = gov't

Important = imp

Behaviour = bhvr

ie - This was found on a New York subway -

"If u cn rd ths, u cn gt a gd jb."

Use an Apostrophe:

Government = gov't

Amount = am't

Use "G" to Represent "ING" Endings:

Checking = ckg

Establishing = estg

Spell Short Words Fully:

In, at, to, but, for

Leave out Unimportant Words:

Adjectives, adverbs (eg. - a, the, to)

Write out Full Term Once, Then Substitute:

Ex. - *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing* = EMDR

Strategies for Effective Note Taking

- Discern the Purpose of Lectures
- Overall Organization of Notes
 - Use loose-leaf paper and binders as this allows you to file handouts with the relevant lecture
 - Put your name, phone number and email address in your notes
 - Number pages and identify with a date
 - Write on only one side of the page; you can use the other side to add information from the text, examples, or review questions
 - Leave lots of white space so that you can add comments later; your notes will look better and will be easier to use when it comes time for exam review
- Enhance your Learning During Note Taking
 - Strive to be more active in your note taking; don't just record what your professor is saying
 - Think about what is being said
 - Think about what it means
 - Listen for and note the 'I' of lectures - thesis, arguments, conclusion
- Try the Cornell Note Taking System

Steps to the Cornell Method:
Set up the page:

 - Draw a 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " margin on the left side of your paper
 - Draw a 1-2" margin across the bottom of your paper
 - The large right hand column will be for normal note taking
 - The smaller left hand column will be for interacting with the material
 - The area at the bottom will be for writing a summary
- Record your notes
 - Capture the professor's ideas and facts in the 6" right hand column

Ways to Organize Information in Notes

Once you know what to look and listen for, and you have your page set up, make sure your notes are organized to assist in later exam preparations.

Organize Notes

1. Try to give each lecture a title. Ask yourself, "What is this all about?"
2. Highlight headings and subheadings.
3. Try to indent information under the related heading; this helps organize related ideas and aids memory.
4. Under headings and subheadings, list important details with bullets, numbers or letters.
5. Make graphs and diagrams large enough to read easily. Label them well so that they will be meaningful to you later.
6. Use alternate note structuring techniques for different kinds of material.
ie. When ideas are being compared, draw a line down the middle of the column and collect relevant details on each side.

Fill in Gaps Later

After your lecture, find the next free time to read over your notes, fill in any gaps and make them more legible (do this when the lecture is still fresh in your mind).

Use the Cue Column

Having and using an interactive column will make listening more active and enhance your learning from lectures.

- Make a note of any exam hints
- Interact with the material - reflect, apply the facts and ideas
 - What is the significance of these facts and ideas?
 - What principles are they based on?
 - How can I apply this?
 - How do they fit in with what I already know?
- Write key words that represent the main points
- Listen for and note the 'I' of lectures (TAC)
- Record questions that summarize the material; this helps to clarify meaning, reveal the relationships, establish continuity and aids memory

Use the Summary Row at the Bottom

In the 1-2" margin across the bottom of your page, you can write a summary of the notes on that page. Try to summarize in 1-2 sentences.

- A convenient 'in a nut shell' version of a full page of notes
- Helps you step back and look at the implications of what you wrote

Cornell Note-Taking Challenge

Think about the way you have conducted reviews of your notes in the past. Respond to the following statements by circling "always", "often", "sometimes", "seldom", or "never" after each.

- I review my notes immediately after class.
Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never
- I conduct weekly reviews of my notes.
Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never
- I make summary sheets of my notes.
Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never
- I edit my notes within 24 hours.
Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never
- Before class I conduct a brief review of the notes I took in the previous class.
Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

After applying the Cornell Note-Taking method for one month, evaluate how you are reviewing your notes. Respond to the following statements by circling "always", "often", "sometimes", "seldom", or "never" after each. **CELEBRATE YOUR CHANGE!**

- I review my notes immediately after class.
Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never
- I conduct weekly reviews of my notes.
Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never
- I make summary sheets of my notes.
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- I edit my notes within 24 hours.
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- Before class I conduct a brief review of the notes I took in the previous class.
Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

Reviewing Notes

Research indicates that we forget 60% of random information that we hear within 24 hours. Even though lectures can be meaningful information, it is still very likely that if you do not reread your notes promptly, you will forget a good portion of the lecture material.

Some Strategies for Reviewing Notes:

Make a Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Try to find a regular time (15-20 min) after the lecture to go over the notes you took in class- This should save you hours in study time later
Cornell Method of Note-Taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Write key words/short phrases in the 2" margin to summarize main points- Summarize sections of the lecture with questions in the margin to quiz yourself later- Write a brief summary of the whole lecture at the end of your notes- Make up 2-3 review questions from the lecture
Note any Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Record any issues that you need to clarify then follow up with the professor or TA
Personal Reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Add any personal reflections or expansion on the topic in the white space of your notes
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Try to reread the key words every 2 weeks to refresh your memory on course content
Study Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Get together with a friend or study group and use your notes for discussion

Improving Your Concentration

The ability to concentrate while performing academic work is critical for academic success. Try the following strategies for improving your focus.

Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Try to find a comfortable, temperate, well lit and ventilated study environment, free of distractions - Find a place that you use exclusively for study so that the environment becomes associated with concentration - Avoid studying in bed, so it is associated with sleep
Ignore Distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Controlling the impulse to attend to distractions will increasingly make them less distracting - Try not to get annoyed with distractions, that will make them more influential
Deal With Worries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When distracted by a worry write it down, specify a time you will deal with it and imagine yourself putting it into a jar you can open when you need to - Relaxation techniques, proper risk assessment, and a specific time where you do all your worrying can help
Deal With Anxiety or Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - These two emotional states interfere with your ability to concentrate. A counselor may help in this situation.
Increase Your Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The more motivated you are to learn, the easier it will be to concentrate
Honour Your Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your mind will be more inclined to concentrate when your body receives proper nutrition, regular exercise and adequate sleep
Set SMART Study Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You'll be inclined to concentrate when your study goals are Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Realistic, and Time limited
Peak Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note when you study best and schedule your more demanding or less interesting material for these times
Breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular breaks will give your mind a rest - Gradually increase study time in between breaks
Reward Yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a reward system for concentrated study time - Rewards should be positive and an immediate result of concentrated effort
Use Active Study Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask yourself questions, dialogue with your material, quiz yourself, summarize, take sides of an argument, critique
Test Yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing a way to test your studying will encourage you to focus on the material and enhance your learning
Self-Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep a record of each time your mind wanders off; this helps increase concentration and monitors improvement