Lecture Note-Taking

Suggestions for Taking Notes

Lecture notes provide a record of the lecture content. Notes should also represent your understanding of that content. By taking notes, you will be encouraged to take a more active thinking part in the lectures and to do reference reading. Reorganized or edited notes can form the basis for integrating all course materials and information. This may help to reduce cramming at the end of the quarter.

Note: It is important to decide after the first few sessions of class whether you can record the content easily or not. Things about the instructor, the room or yourself may cause difficulties in note-taking. For example, if the rate of speech is too rapid or too slow, if hearing or seeing is a problem or if you background in the subject area is weak, you may need to concentrate on simply getting all the information down without an attempt to organize it. Typing the entire lecture or having a classmate share in the not-taking process may help to insure that you at least know what was presented. Taking down complete content will require considerable time later to weed out relationships and significant material, however.

If getting the content down is now problem, then you can focus on the best form and structure to promote understanding.

Content of Lecture Material

Instructors have different ideas about what “learning” in their lectures should include. In some courses, especially introductory courses, delivering a body of knowledge is the chief aim. In others, comparative viewpoints may be criticized; controversial issues maybe discussed; research may be presented; or theoretical brainstorming may be emphasized. It is important that you try to define the instructor's aim of his lectures.

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.

Format of Lectures

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 around 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** – presents content in some time pattern, such as from the earliest date to the most recent.
4. **Spatial** – uses diagram, map or picture 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 not apparent connection.

Knowing how the lecturer builds his lecture will help you structure you notes and learn the material. If you need help with this, talk with the T.A.s or with the professor.
Suggestions For Taking Notes
or
What to do Before, During and After the Lecture

Before

 Review yesterday’s notes and edit them if you have not done so. Think about today’s presentation.
 Study today’s lesson, text, or readings.
 Survey or preview the next lesson.

During

Actively participate:
1. Do more listening, 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 the board; repetitions; gestures.
3. Ask questions or write them down for future clarification when you disagree or are unsure.
4. Sit in the front of the classroom if you have difficulty concentrating. Maintain eye contact with the instructor when possible.
5. Put it in your own words.

Have a system of taking notes:
1. Dashed or indented outlining is usually best, except for some science courses such as physics or mathematics.
   a. The information that is most general begins at the left with each more specific group of facts indented with additional spaces to the right.
   b. The relationships between the different parts is carried out through indenting.
   c. No numbers, letters, or Roman numerals are needed.
   d. An example of indenting is this exercise!
2. If the lecture format is distinct (such as chronological), you may set up your paper by drawing columns and labeling appropriate headings in a table.
   a. During the lecture you record a piece of information in the appropriate category.
   b. An example of tabling structure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Individual Representatives</th>
<th>Major Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Use specific techniques to save time and avoid confusion.
   a. Use abbreviations.
   b. Condense thoughts to your own words when possible
   c. Leave blanks for unsure spellings or materials not heard; fill in later.
   d. Copy important names, dates, and formulas carefully.
   e. Omit anecdotes and detailed illustrations.
   f. Place your own reactions in a special column so as not to confuse them with the lecturer’s views.
Edit your notes as soon as possible – the quicker you do so the less material you will forget.

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.

Set 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.
Methods of Abbreviation

Below are some suggestions you can use to save time and work for taking notes from lectures or books.

Omit Unnecessary Words

Sentences can be shortened by leaving out unnecessary words and saying the same thing in your own words. Compare the sentences below:

Example: In *A Farewell to Arms* your have a remarkable sense of being on the scene as the story unfolds.
Abbreviated: In *A Farewell to Arms* you have the sense of being on the scene.
Abbreviated: In *F.T.A* you feel you’re there.

Conventional Abbreviations of Individual Words

Numerous conventional abbreviations are available to help you save further time. Some are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g.</td>
<td>for example</td>
<td>p. or pp.</td>
<td>page or pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.f.</td>
<td>see also</td>
<td>&amp;</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca.</td>
<td>approximately</td>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>and so forth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.e</td>
<td>in other words</td>
<td></td>
<td>therefore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several symbols indicate relationships to save words. A colon (:) may be used when two things are closely connected, and either a (:) or (=) maybe be used to represent “is” or “are” as an “equals” sign.

**Example:** A horse is a mammal
Abbreviated: Horse: mammal
Abbreviated: Horse = mammal

Personal Abbreviations of Individual Words

Another way to shorten words is to make up your own abbreviations. This can be done by either leaving off word endings or omitting internal letters.

Example: The ending “-ing” can be shortened to “-g” as in writg.
Example: “Boat” is a wd w 2 vowls.
Abbreviated: “Boat” is a wd w 2 vowls.
Abbreviated: “Boat” = wd w 2 vow.