



Notetaking from lectures



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Notetaking techniques

Purpose of lectures

Lectures are intended to present new material, ideas and concepts which have been organised by a lecturer to provide students with an overview of a specific topic area.

- * Lecture material should not be seen as the sole source of information on a topic. You will need to supplement lecture material with prescribed reading.

Before a lecture

There ARE advantages in spending time preparing for a lecture:

- Background reading greatly enhances the value of a lecture.
- Have in mind some questions you expect to have answered by a lecture. This all helps FOCUS your thoughts.

During the lecture

Listening is more important than just hearing. Hearing is a passive process whereas listening must be active.

Here are some suggestions for becoming an active listener:

- The lecturer's introductory comments provide the key purpose to the lecture. Try to be in the habit of focusing your attention early so you don't miss this.
- Try to minimise distractions. Catch up on the gossip after the lecture.
- Watch for verbal clues.

for example:

- "There are four main aspects ..."
- "To sum up ..."
- Repetition of a point
- Change in voice tone
- Physical gestures (bashing the blackboard or hammering the lectern usually means the point is worth taking down!)

- *Ask questions:*
If you feel you can't ask in the lecture, then jot down the question and ask later.
- *Take notes:*
Even if you don't intend to use them later, the fact of "doing something" aids your concentration. How many people "doodle" when on the phone etc?

Note taking

- * Do not try to take down every word the lecturer says.

The amount of notes you take will vary from lecture to lecture. If you take no notes at all you tend to lose concentration. Even if you are given a transcript of the lecture as a "hand out", underline and highlight major arguments etc. The problem with taking too many notes, is that even if you do succeed in keeping up, you risk becoming so bogged down in detail, you may fail to appreciate the major argument.

Here are some suggestions for successful notetaking:

- ALWAYS start a new page and head your notes clearly with date, lecturer's name, topic, and number in lecture series.
- Try building logical framework into your notetaking:
Use headings HEADINGS
Use sub headings subheadings
Letters (a)
Numbers (i)

Indent from the margin
— like this

and underline for emphasis.

Leave plenty of space for adding points.

Some people find it useful to split the page; writing major and minor arguments down one side, and examples on the other.

- Develop your own shorthand. Tho mk sr y cn rd it ltr.
You can omit vowels:
mn = main
bkgd = background
unnec = unnecessary.

Invent your own abbreviations common to your discipline:

sftwr = software
chrn = chromosomes
ct = computer terminal
subc = subconscious.

Here are some commonly used abbreviations:

> increase	= equals	≠ unequal	bec. because
< decrease	ex. example	w/o without	≡ identical to
∴ therefore	def. definition	⊙ individual	imp. important
➔ caused, led to	i.e. that is	sig. significant	
w/ with	vs. versus		

- You can increase the speed of your writing by simplifying the style. Take a look at your handwriting, does it have any excessive loops, or unnecessary extras like circled dots:

like this

You'll also find your notes easier to read a month down the track if you've avoided using pencil or green biro.

- Take full note of any references given. Make sure you have all the publication details — author, title, date, publisher etc.
- Take notes in your own words. It means you have to think about the material.
- Don't neglect to note down any blackboard summary. (If it was important enough for the lecturer to put up, it's most definitely important enough for you to write down.)

After the lecture

Review. That night (not in six weeks when you've forgotten all the important bits!)
— check your notes for legibilities (easy to do now, impossible if you leave it until you've forgotten what it was all about)
— add words or phrases to improve the clarity
— can you improve on the organisation at all?
— follow up references NOW, before everyone else wants them
— if there are any areas which seem unclear, get them sorted out NOW.

Reviewing lecture notes the night of the lecture is a very useful study habit to adopt. It need only take a few minutes but it means potential problems can be dealt with before they become overwhelming.

Organising time in the library

There are two options here — taking notes from books and journals in the traditional way, or photocopying. If your on-campus library time is limited because of illness, work commitments, or lengthy travel, then photocopying reference material can be very valuable. It also means you have the complete text available for later reference. Photocopying detailed tables or graphs etc. also makes a lot of sense. However, consider the following:

- It can fool you into thinking you've "done" a reference when you've really only copied it. (You are wasting forest resources, breathing noxious fumes — and you still haven't read the material.)
- You may well have spent more time waiting in the photocopying queue than it would have taken to extract the essential points.
- Mounds of photocopying material are difficult to file and store — they often just end up on the floor or the car.

Another alternative to making summaries is to underline or highlight material and make additional comments in the margin. This can save a lot of time and the act of wielding a pen tends to aid concentration. However, consider the following:

- it can stop you noticing other important points and ideas
- it shapes your appreciation of the material in a way that may restrict your thinking, especially if you use the same material later for a different purpose
- it fools you into thinking you've thought when all you've really done is noticed.

Remember too, this is only possible with your own books and photocopies.

When taking notes from books and journals, consider the advantages of using file cards.

- easy storage
- easy access (consider the advantage over the length of your course and into employment)
- storage of foolscap in manilla folders etc. can become very bulky.

When taking notes from books or journals, don't forget to ensure you have all the publication details. (It's often useful to include the library catalogue number in case you want to return to the reference.) Make sure too, that you record quotes accurately, including page number.

When writing notes, decide what information you require. Your notes should include key words and phrases, headings and subheadings. They should be concise summaries with simple diagrams and drawings — no long passages copied from the text.

(See also Reading Effectively — Some Suggested Strategies)