

# Note Taking

## Overrated...distracting...inconsistent...

Many students just don't know how to take notes and cite the above reasons for not learning to do it correctly. Yes, there is a right way to take notes - below are some quick pointers.

## Why Take Notes at All?

- To capture the instructor's ideas in the order they are given.
- To force yourself to listen carefully and test your understanding of the material.
- To help you remember what you've heard in class.
- To provide a gauge of what is important in the text when you review.
- To have a resource that is personal and easier to remember than the text.
- To help you remember important points even before you study the material formally.

## How to Take Notes

### Before Class...

- **Form your own system of note taking.**
  - Try different note-taking techniques and figure out which one fits your style of learning and comprehension.
  - See <http://www.sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl/notetaking.systems.html> for different methods.
- **Keep all your notes from the same course together.**
  - This is crucial for studying and saves valuable time searching for missing notes.
- **Date your notes and number your pages.**
  - In case pages go missing, you will know which notes from which days of lecture are missing.
- **Prepare for the coming lecture** by reading the material to be covered and reviewing what was presented at the last lecture.

### During Class...

- **Sit close enough to engage the speaker.**
  - If you cannot clearly hear and see the speaker, you have given up before you have begun.
- **Be neat.**
- **Keep your notes brief.**
  - Never use a sentence where you can use a phrase; never use a phrase where you can use a word.
  - Use abbreviations and symbols, but be consistent.
- **ACTIVELY LISTEN!**
  - Listening is the absorption of the MEANING of words and sentences by the brain.
  - Listening is a skill and requires practice for improvement; it is not simply hearing.
  - Listening involves the transfer of ideas from short-term memory to long-term memory.
- **Listen for oral cues from lecturers.**
  - Making a statement such as "Remember this!"
  - Repeating an idea.
  - Speaking more loudly or more slowly.
  - Numbering of ideas, for example, "The main causes of the war were..."
  - Using gestures, pounding on a desk, etc.
  - Writing on the board.
  - Using transition words such as "therefore" or "however"
- **In the margins, note any points of contention with the lecture.**
  - The professor makes a conclusion that you don't think follows from the data? Take note of it and ask.

## After Class...

- **Focus on data and larger ideas that bring the lecture together with a theme.**
  - It is ultimately more important that you gather the main ideas and concepts of the lecture versus the small details.
- **Review your notes after lecture.**
  - As soon as possible after the lecture is over, review your notes and fill in anything still on your mind. Also make sure your notes form a coherent section.
- **Clarify** any part of your notes that do not make sense or could be reinforced by material from the textbook.

## What NOT to do:

- **Call a subject dull.** Always look for important and useful information
- **Criticize a speaker.** Look for ideas, not things to criticize.
- **Overreact.** Listen with the mind, not the emotions. Simply write down disagreements to ask about later.
- **Listen for facts only.** Always look for the “big picture” as to how the ideas relate to each other.
- **Outline everything.** Instead adjust to the speaker’s organizational pattern.
- **Fake attention.** Even the most attentive posture, though it may fool the lecturer, will not induce learning.
- **Yield to distractions.** Discipline yourself to shut out distractions and maintain concentration.
- **Not take advantage of spare time.** Use pauses in the lecture to consolidate and distinguish key ideas and concepts.
- **Try to use every space on the page.** Leave room for coordinating your notes with the text after lecture. (You may want to list key terms in the margin or make a summary of the contents of the page.)

## Some More Advice:

Some students plan to *rewrite* or type their notes later. This uses double the amount of time: once to take the original notes and twice to rewrite them. It’s simple: DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME!

Do not rely strictly on recorded lessons (on a cassette tape, etc.). A lecture on tape bars flexibility. Take, for example, a note-taker versus a note-recorder. Immediately after taking notes, the note-taker can study them in five minutes before the next class, walking toward the next building, drinking coffee, etc. Furthermore, this student, in looking over the notes, may decide that they contain only four worthwhile ideas that can be highlighted, relegating the rest of the lecture to obscurity. Handwritten notes may be studied selectively.

The lecture on tape, however, has to be listened to in its entirety - including worthwhile points as well as “garbage.” A student who takes the “easy” way out - recording the lecture on tape as he or she sits back doing nothing - will box him or herself into inflexibility.

(Concepts borrowed from: Taking Lecture and Class Notes, Academic Skills Center, Dartmouth College, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/notes.html>)

## Helpful Resources:

- Your academic adviser is always available for advice on time management.
- Contact Mrs. Day (410-516-5506) in OAA about Study Consulting.
- Helpful websites:
  - <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/notes.html>
  - <http://www.sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl/notetaking.systems.html>
  - <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/academic/notes-tips.htm>