

## (Wiki-)How to Take Perfect Lecture Notes

*Taking great notes is a lost art. Here's how to get the most out of a lecture, and have amazing notes to show for it.*

### Before the Lecture Begins

1. Prepare for the lecture so that you will be more likely to predict the organization of the lecture.
  - Check the course outline to see if it lists the topic or key ideas in the upcoming lecture. If so, convert this information into questions to be answered in the lecture.
  - Before the lecture, complete outside reading or reference assignments.
  - Review the text assignment and any reading notes taken.
  - Review notes from the previous lecture.
2. Sit as near to the front as possible to eliminate distractions.
3. Have a proper attitude. Listening well is a matter of paying close attention. Be prepared to be open-minded to what the lecturer may say even though you may disagree with it.

### During the Lecture

1. Have your lecture paper and pencil or pen ready. The last thing you want to do is have your pen run out of ink, or your pencil break, without a backup (or a sharpener) ready.
2. Write down the title of the lecture, the name of the course and the date.
3. Listen carefully to the introduction (if there is one). By knowing his outline, you will be better prepared to anticipate what notes you will need to take. Decipher this outline by listening for a 1-topic and then 2-supporting points or examples.
4. Copy what's written on the blackboard and transparencies, especially the outline. To make sure you get everything, get in the habit of skipping words like "the" and "a" and make use of shorthand and abbreviations. Summarize your notes in your own words, not the instructor's. Remember: your goal is to understand what she is saying, not to try to record exactly everything she says.
5. Recognize main ideas by signal words that indicate something important is to follow. See the tip on signals below.
6. Jot down details or examples that support the main ideas. Take down examples and sketches which the lecturer presents. Indicate examples with "EX." Give special attention to details not covered in the textbook.
7. If there is a summary at the end of the lecture, pay close attention to it. You can use it to check the organization of your notes. If your notes seem disorganized, copy down the main points covered in the summary. It will help in revising your notes later.
8. At the end of the lecture, ask questions about points you did not understand. But do not ask stupid, silly or long questions that may pull-out the lecture far into your break.

### After the Lecture

1. Revise your notes as quickly as possible, preferably immediately after the lecture, since at that time you will still remember a good deal of the lecture.
2. During the first review period after the lecture, coordinate reading and lecture notes.
3. Review your lecture notes at least once a week. Also, review the lecture notes before the next lecture.

### Tips

- Collect notes for each course in one place, in a separate notebook or section of a notebook.
- Write notes on one side of the page only.
- Use a loose-leaf notebook rather than a notebook with a permanent binding. See the pattern of a lecture by spreading out the pages.

- Use 2 pieces of paper, 1 as a draft, and 1 as your final notes.
- Enter notes legibly because it saves time. Make them clear.
- Box assignments and suggested books so you can identify them quickly.
- Mark ideas which the lecture emphasizes with an arrow or some special symbol.
- When the teacher looks at his/her notes, pay attention to what they say next.
- Trade your "draft" notes with a classmate after each lecture.
- Incorporate different colors of ink, diagrams, drawings of your own. Make your notes **your** notes. Take advantage of how you learn (visually, aurally, or actively) and write/draw your notes according to that style.
- Watch for signal words. Your instructor is not going to send up a rocket when she states an important new idea or gives an example, but will use signals to telegraph what she is doing. Every good speaker does it, and you should expect to receive these signals. For example, she may introduce an example with "for example" as done here. Other common signals:
  - "There are three reasons why...." (Here they come!)
  - "First...Second... Third..." (There they are!)
  - "And most important,...." (A main idea!)
  - "A major development...." (A main idea again!)
- S/He may signal support material with:
  - "On the other hand...."
  - "On the contrary...."
  - "For example...."
  - "Similarly...."
  - "In contrast...."
  - "Also...."
  - "Further...."
  - "Furthermore...."
  - "As an example...."
  - "For instance...."
- S/he may signal conclusion or summary with:
  - "Therefore...."
  - "As a result...."
  - "In summary...."
  - "In conclusion...."
  - "Finally...."
  - "From this we see...."
- S/He may signal very loudly with:
  - "Now this is important...."
  - "Remember that...."
  - "The important idea is that...."
  - "The basic concept here is...."
- Consider splitting the page into two columns — keep lecture notes on one side, and write questions that come up during the lecture on the other side. This will ensure that you don't forget any unclear points or questions that come up during the lecture, and will enable you to associate the answer with the relevant material when you find it later. Also, if you go to office hours, your professor will notice that you were paying attention in class, which will pay off in the long run.

### Warnings

- Do not perform manual activities which will detract from taking notes. Do not doodle or play with your pen. These activities break eye contact and concentration. Although some people learn best while fidgeting (an active learning style), it is distracting to others. Therefore, if you learn best while doodling or tapping your foot, sit near people who do the same or who don't keep glaring in your direction.
- If you are gathering together your personal belongings when you should be listening, you're bound to miss an important point—perhaps an announcement about the next exam.