

Learning how to learn

How to take lecture notes?!

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Learning to make notes effectively is an indispensable skill for students and professionals alike. Even in a talk where handouts are available, note taking can help you focus on the essential aspects of the topic. As you make notes, you will develop skill in selecting important material and in discarding that is less useful. The secret to developing this skill is practice. However, we will introduce here important means and techniques to enable you develop a better informed note taking practice.

Why take lecture notes?

Some important reasons for taking lecture notes include:

- Helps you to listen carefully and focus on the topic (developing your listening skill!)
- Improves your writing and organizational skills
- Document your learning
- Formulate questions for the current and following sessions
- Guide your further reading

How to identify important messages of a lecture?

The way the lecturer or speaker delivers his talk usually gives clues to what is important to take down as a note. Some of the more common clues include:

- Material written on the blackboard
- Repetition of a concept, ideas or facts
- Emphasis on certain issues. This can be judged by tone of voice, gesture and the amount of time devoted to a certain issue.

- Word signals, e.g. the most important **five points** are....., the **fundamental** factor to be considered here is....., in **conclusion**.....
- Summaries given at the end (take home messages)
- A list of recommended readings

What are the common techniques of note taking?

Each student or professional should develop his or her own method of note taking. However, the following suggestions may be useful

- Make your notes brief
 - Use phrases instead of sentences and words instead of phrases.
 - Use abbreviations and symbols consistently. You can use your self-developed abbreviations but it is recommended to remain consistent with the known abbreviations.
- Write notes in your own words. However; formulas, definitions, quotations and facts should be noted exactly.
- Organize your writing down of notes.
 - Use outline form and/or a numbering system.
 - Use indentation to distinguish between major and minor points.
 - Highlight important words by using bold or underlining etc..
 - If you miss a statement, do not be worried. Just write key words, skip a few space and get the information later.
 - Do not try to use every space on the page. Leave blank space for your subsequent review and additions.

- Date your notes and number the pages to avoid mixing up!

Coming back to your notes!

Note taking is not useful unless you return back to review your notes. Remember that if you neglect your notes for some period, you will find difficulty in interpreting what you have actually written!! So you should develop a habit of returning quickly to your notes in order to clarify items and add extra points where relevant. Doing so, note taking can eventually help you to follow up your studies, focus your learning and identify relevant further reading sources.

Sources

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