

Taking Lecture Notes

There are many reasons for taking lecture notes:

1. Making yourself take notes forces you to listen carefully and tests your understanding of the material.
2. When you are reviewing, notes provide a gauge to what is important in the text.
3. Personal notes are usually easier to remember than the text.
4. The writing down of important points helps you to remember them even before you have studied the material formally.

Instructors usually give clues as to what is important to take down. Some of the common clues are:

1. Material written on the blackboard.
2. Repetition.
3. Emphasis.
 - Emphasis can be judged by tone of voice and gesture.
 - Emphasis can be judged by the amount of time the instructor spends on points and examples.
4. Word signals (e.g., “There are *two points of view*...,” “The *third* reason is...,” “In *conclusion*...”).
5. Summaries given at end of class.
6. Reviews given at beginning of class.

Each student should develop his own method of taking notes, but most students find the following suggestions helpful:

1. Make 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
2. Put most notes in your own words. However, the following should be noted exactly:
 - Formulas
 - Definitions
 - Specific facts
3. Use outline form and/or a numbering system. Indentation helps you distinguish major from minor points.
4. If you miss a statement, write key words, skip a few spaces, and get the information later.
5. Do not try to use every space on the page. Leave room for coordinating your notes with the text after the lecture. (You may want to list key terms in the margin or to make a summary of the contents of the page.)
6. Date your notes. Perhaps number the pages.

Working with lecture notes:

There are several good reasons for organizing and reviewing your notes as soon as possible after the lecture.

1. While the lecture is still fresh in your mind, you can fill in from memory examples and facts, which you did not have time to write down during the lecture. Moreover, you can recall what parts of the lecture were unclear to you so that you can consult the lecturer, the graduate assistant, a classmate, your text, or additional readings for further information.
2. Immediate review results in better retention than review after a longer period of time. Unless a student reviews within 24 hours after the lecture or sometime before the next lecture, his retention will drop, and he will be *relearning* rather than *reviewing*.

A method of annotation is usually preferable to recopying notes, and the following suggestions for annotating may be helpful:

1. Underline key statements or important concepts.
2. Use asterisks or other signal marks to indicate importance.
3. Use margins or blank pages for coordinating notes with the text. Perhaps indicate relevant pages of the text beside the corresponding information in the notes.
4. Use a key and a summary:
 - Use one of the margins to keep a key to important names, formulas, dates, concepts, and the like. This forces you to anticipate questions of an objective nature and provides specific facts that you need to develop essays.
 - Use the other margins to write a short summary of the topics on the page, relating the contents of the page to the whole lecture or to the lecture of the day before. Condensing the notes in this way not only helps you to learn them, it also prepares you for the kind of thinking requires on essay exams and many so-called “objective” exams.

Abbreviations in note taking

A group of Chemistry students at the University of Maryland, in discussing listening and effective note taking, came to the following conclusions:

1. Use of abbreviations in note taking is helpful.
2. It is possible to abbreviate frequently used words and still understand them from context. E.g., *w* for *with* and *ch* for *chapter*. Statements such as *H2 rcts w O2 and Rd ch 6 for next lect* are easily understood.
3. Should an abbreviation be confusing, write out the word instead, e.g., does *no* mean *no* or *number*, does *wd* mean *word*, *wood*, or *would*?
4. Go over your notes as soon as possible after the lecture to clarify any confusing abbreviations, illegibilities or misunderstandings.
5. Use plurals and other endings wherever appropriate, e.g., *rct*, *rctg*, *rct'n* for *react*, *reacting*, *reaction*.
6. Learn the standard abbreviations that have been developed in the field of study. They are usually available for frequently used words and phrases, e.g., *->* signifies a chemical reaction.
7. Abbreviations usually consist of the first letter and other significant letters of English words. If not, knowing the derivation of a word may help you understand the abbreviation. *Hg* for *Mercury* and *Ag* for *Silver* come from the original names of these elements. *Hydrargyrum* and *Argentum*.
8. Research shows that the vowels are the least-noticed letters in the visual configuration of a word. Two types of most-noticed letters are ascenders and descenders – letters such as *t*, *h*, *l*, *g*, *y* and *g*, which extend either above or below the line and letters at the beginning or end of a word. Therefore, in making abbreviations, leave out the vowels and middle letters of a word.

Here are some abbreviations used in lecture notes. Can you add any? Are any confusing to you?

sol'n = solution	= = equals or equal	ie = therefore
w = with	≠ = unequal	prob = problem
imp = important	abs = absolute	probs = problems
impr = improve	sq.rt. = square root	mult = multiply
kn = know	¶ = paragraph	vol = volume
kdge = knowledge	ch = chapter	V = volume or velocity
no. or # = number	th = theory	

Suggested note taking abbreviations:

-	Minus	ng	Nothing
+	Plus	ag	Anything
&	And	F	Women, Females
=	Equals	M	Men, Males
1/2	One half	->	Leads to, results in
#(s)	Numbers	2x (3x, 10x, etc.)	Twice as large, two times as many

re	About	pg	Page(s)
eg	For example	ref	Reference
et al	Others	phil	Philosophy, Psychology
gov't	Government	sci	Science
xn(ty)	Christian (ity)	pl	Political
wk	Week	ie	That is, therefore
yr	Year	b	But
w/	With	tk	Take
w/o	Without	hw	Homework
w/i	Within	rd	Read
w/x	With the exception of	J, jnl	Journal
sg	Something		

How to take notes:

- Use a large, loose-leaf notebook (this will provide room for writing notes, drawing diagrams, and recording examples). The loose-leaf style will allow you to insert handouts in topical or chronological order. Write only on one side of the paper.
- Draw a vertical line about 2 1/2 " from the left edge of each sheet (this is the recall column which you will use later).
- During the lecture, write your class notes, make your scribbles more legible, and fill in the space left blank. Next, underline or box in the words containing the main ideas.
- After the lecture, read through your notes, make your scribbles more legible, and fill in the space left blank. Next, underline or box in the words containing the main ideas.
- Now write the key words and phrases in the recall column.

According to Dr. Jerome Bruner of Harvard, the most fundamental thing that can be said about the human memory is that detail must be organized under meaningful categories or it is rapidly forgotten.

- Draw graphs and other pictorial information in the left column with the descriptive labels listed in the right.
- Handouts are most effectively studied when read in the same sequence as presented during the lecture. Place the letter 'H' in your notes when the handout was presented and insert the handout into the notebook.
- Circle new vocabulary words and leave enough space after them to insert a definition.
- To study, cover up the right side of the sheet, exposing only the words and phrases in the recall column. Using these key words and phrases as cues, *recite* aloud the facts and ideas of the lecture.

In his book, How to Study in College, Walter Pauk comments that the procedure of reciting is the most powerful learning technique known to psychologists.

- Uncover the notes and verify what you have said.
- Reread what you do not know *before* going on to read over what you already know.

References:

Clark, E. and David, A. "Note Taking With T-Notes." Journal of Developmental and Remedial Education, Winter, 1982, pp. 8-9.

Pauk, W. How to Study in College, 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.