

Note Taking and In-Class Skills

Adequate notes are a necessary addition to efficient study and learning in college. Think over the following suggestions and improve your note-taking system where needed.

- Listen actively—if possible think before you write, but don't get behind.
- Be open-minded about points you disagree on. Don't let arguing interfere with your note-taking.
- Raise questions if appropriate. No need to start with "I have a question." Make sure you ask concisely without repeating yourself or giving too much explanation.
- Develop and use a standard method of note-taking including punctuation, abbreviations, margins, etc.
- Take and keep notes in a large notebook. The only value to a small notebook is ease of carrying and that's not your main objective. A large notebook allows you to indent and use an outline form.
- Leave a few spaces blank as you move from one point to the next so you can fill in additional points later if necessary. Your objective is to take helpful notes, not to save paper.
- Do not try to write down everything the lecturer says. It's impossible and unnecessary because not everything is of equal importance. Spend more time listening and attempt to take down the main points. If you're writing as fast as you can, you can't be as selective a listener. There may be some times, however, when it is more important to write than to think.
- Listen for cues as to important points, transition from one point to the next, repetition of points for emphasis, changes in voice inflections, enumeration of a series of points, etc.
- Try to see the main points and do not get lost in a barrage of minor points which don't seem related to each other. Many lecturers try to present a few major points and several minor points in a lecture. The rest is explanatory material and samples. The relationship is there if you will listen for it.
- Make your original notes legible enough for your own reading, but use abbreviations of your own invention when possible. The effort required to recopy notes can be better spent in rereading them and thinking about them. Although neatness is a virtue, it does not necessarily increase your learning.
- Copy down everything on the board, regardless. Every blackboard scribble may be a clue to an exam item. You may not be able to incorporate what is on the board into your lecture notes, but if you copy it, it may serve as a useful clue for you later. If not, you haven't wasted anything. You were in the classroom anyway.
- Sit as close to the front of the class as possible. There are fewer distractions and it is easier to hear, see and attend to important material.
- Get assignments and suggestions precisely—ask questions if you're not sure.

Attributed to Texas A&M University