

Note Taking

Note taking keeps you involved in your classes, and it helps to remember materials when you have them recorded on paper. Note taking is also a way to capture critical information. For example, your professor may provide materials that are only available during in-class lecture. It is important to take precise notes, because notes are your sources for exam preparation, studying, and support for your paper assignments.

Before Class

- Be prepared! Check the course syllabus for topics and key ideas in the upcoming lecture
- Skim relevant reading assignments to acquaint yourself with main ideas
- Refresh important ideas from the previous lecture so that you can easily make connections to new concepts in the upcoming lecture
- 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 Class

- Arrive on time!
- Sit as near to the front of the room as possible to help eliminate distractions
- Write the title of the lecture, the name of the course, and the date at the top of your paper
- Be brief, but precise, in your note taking. Less is more!
 - Refer to the multiple types of note taking explainers on the SSC website to determine a note taking method that works the best for the courses you are in, knowing that different classes may utilize different methods
- Summarize notes in your own words, not the instructor's. Remember that your goal is to understand what they are saying, not to try and record exactly everything as it is being said
- Use abbreviations for frequently used long words (i.e., b/c for because; EX for example) but be consistent in your use of form, abbreviation, etc.
- Avoid the passive listener approach of trying to "get it all", instead, listen for and take notes on main ideas, key details, and transitional phrases which point to the structure and focus of the lecture
- Label important points and organizational clues as main points, examples, etc. Try to recognize main ideas by signal words that indicate something important is to follow. I.e., "First, Second, Next, Thus, Then, Another important point..." etc.
- Write down details or examples that support the main ideas. Give special attention to details not covered in your textbook
- Ask questions!
- Instead of closing your notebook early and getting ready to leave, listen carefully to information given toward the end of class. For instance, an announcement about the next exam or a summary highlighting a main point.

Note Taking, Part 2

What you do with your notes after class is almost even MORE important than how you take them during class. Your class notes will become the basis for how you are reviewing and studying after class. Don't be afraid to transform your notes into a different format after class, either! View the strategies below for more information.

After Class

- Clarify any questions you may have by asking your professor, teaching assistant (TA), tutor, study group leader, or a classmate
- Revise your notes, labeling main points, adding recall clues, and questions to be answered
- Make note of your ideas or reflections in the margins
- Highlight the key points in your notes with different colors
- Review your notes at least once a week and before your next lecture

Things to Keep in Mind

- Focus on information that reflects main themes of the course, keywords from overheads or PowerPoint presentations, information that is repeated or is confusing, and details that build on course readings and previous lectures
- Collect notes for each course in one place so that you can stay organized throughout the semester
- Use a loose-leaf notebook or a notetaking application rather than a notebook with a permanent binding--this will allow you to have additional space to add comments and to include course handouts
- Do not perform manual activities (i.e., texting, doodling) which will detract from taking notes and cause you to lose concentration
- Write your notes legibly!
- Put a box around assignments and suggested books so you can identify them quickly
- Listening and note taking are SKILLS. The more you practice these techniques, the more skilled you will become.