

Listening and Note Taking

Listening To Take Good Notes:

Hearing is a spontaneous act. Listening, by contrast, is something you choose to do. Listening requires you not only to hear what has been said but to understand as well. Understanding requires three activities: dynamic listening; paying attention, concentration

The best way to concentrate is to start with anticipation. Review your notes from the last lecture and make sure you go to class having read the assigned material. Use this method to cultivate a mindset that is needed for 100% concentration during a lecture.

Be a comprehensive listener! Comprehensive listening has to do with the feedback between speaker and listener. The speaker has an obligation to make his/her words comprehensible to the listener. The listener, in turn, must let the speaker know when he/she does not understand. Both parties must make a conscious effort to accept their individual responsibilities. You may think this is a 50/50 proposition, which in part it is; however, both parties must be willing to give a 100% for effective listening comprehension to be achieved.

The best way for you to let the speaker know that you don't understand is to ask questions. A surprising number of students are too embarrassed to ask questions. The only dumb question is the one that goes unasked.

Twelve Guidelines to Effective Listening:

- Sit where the instructor will always see you, preferably in the front.
- Pay attention to content, not the lecturer's appearance or distracting habits. Judge the material, not the delivery.
- Put aside emotional concerns. If you disagree with what is being said, hold your judgement or fire until after class, then see the instructor.
- Find areas of interest; listen for ideas, not just facts, and words; put new ideas to work during the lecture by using your imagination.
- Intend to get down a good written record of the lecture material; be a flexible note taker.
- Listen for new words and watch for signals of important information; listen for examples the instructor provides to define or illustrate main ideas. Note these examples with "EX" in your notes or textbook.
- Read in advance about the topics to be discussed in class and relate them to something you care about.
- Exercise your mind with challenging material; keep your mind open even if you hear emotional words.
- Be prepared to ask questions in class. Use facial expressions to let the instructor know that you don't understand an idea completely or you would like the information repeated.
- Don't stop listening or taking notes during discussion periods or toward the end of the lecture until the instructor concludes.
- Work at listening instead of pretending to listen.
- Resist external distractions such as someone coming in late to class, a pager going off, maintenance mowing the grass, other students talking.

Taking Good Notes:

Learning to take notes effectively will help you improve your study and work habits and to remember important information. Often, students are deceived into thinking that because they understand everything that is said in class, they will therefore remember it.

As you take lecture notes and make notes from your textbook, you will develop the skills of selecting important material and discarding unimportant material. The main secret to developing these skills is practice. Check your results constantly. Strive to improve. Notes help you to retain important facts and data and to develop an accurate means of recording and arranging necessary information.

Here are some hints on note making:

- Don't write down everything you read or hear. Be alert and attentive to the main points. Concentrate on the "meat" of the subject and forget the trimmings.
- Notes should consist of key words or very short sentences. As a speaker gets sidetracked, it is often possible to go back and add further information.
- Take accurate notes. You should use your own words, but try not to change the meaning. If you quote directly from the author, quote correctly.
- Think a minute about the material before you start making notes. Don't take notes just to be taking notes! Take notes that will be of real value to you when you review them at a later date.
- Have a uniform system for punctuation and abbreviation that will make sense to you. Use a skeleton outline that shows importance by indenting. Leave lots of white space for later additions.
- Omit descriptions and full explanations. Keep your notes short and to the point. Condense your materials so you can grasp the main points rapidly.
- Don't worry about missing a point. Leave space and pick up the material you missed at a later date, either through reading, questioning, common sense, or looking at a classmate's notes.
- Don't keep notes on oddly shaped pieces of paper. Keep notes in order and in one place. A three-ringed or spiral notebook is preferred.
- Shortly after taking your lecture notes or making textbook notes, go back and edit (not copy) your notes by adding extra points, spelling out unclear items, etc. Remember, we forget rapidly. Budget time for this vital step just as you do for the class itself.
- Review your notes periodically; three types of review are daily, weekly, and a major review just before a test. This is the only way to achieve lasting memory.

Lecture Notes:

There are many note-taking techniques available to help you become a more efficient note-taker. The following are two very good examples. The first example deals with taking good lecture notes and the second with textbook notes.

The notes you take in class are really a hand written textbook. In many instances, your lecture notes are more practical, meaningful and more current than a textbook. If you keep them neat, complete, and well organized they'll serve you splendidly. The Cornell System of taking lecture notes is a prime example. The keystone of this system is a two-column note sheet. Use 8 1/2 by 11 paper to create the note sheet. Down the left side, draw a vertical line 2 1/2 inches from the edge of the paper. End this line 2 inches above the bottom of the paper. Draw a horizontal line across the bottom of the paper 2 inches above the paper's edge. In the narrow (2 1/2") column on the left side, you will write cue words or questions. In the wide (6") column on the right, you will write the lecture notes. In the space at the bottom of the sheet, you will summarize your notes. NOTE: You can use this system if you use lined notebook paper too. Disregard the red vertical line and make your own line 2 1/2" from the left edge of the paper. Refer to the Textbook Study Strategies for a complete description and illustration of the Cornell System.

Textbook Notes:

The second example of efficient note taking deals specifically with taking textbook notes and preparing for exams. The Soprano Study/Reading Technique involves six steps for accomplishing this. This system, in contrast to the SQ4R system in the Study Skills package, is another method for note taking. You should look at both methods carefully, try them both, and then decide which will work the best for you.

The six steps of the Soprano Technique are:

- Read your textbook paragraph by paragraph without a pen or highlighter in hand.
- After you finish a paragraph, decide if any information in that paragraph is worth highlighting or underlining. Ask yourself, "Is this really important? Does it support and define the main topic?"
- Pick up your highlighter or pen and highlight or underline the most important key words or phrases of that information, or write "key words" notes in the margins.
- Then put a number in the margin of the text next to the highlighted or underlined material. Use numbers in ascending order to note the importance of the highlighted or underlined material.
- Put the same number and page on a separate sheet of paper in your notebook. Then write out a question based on the information you have just highlighted or underlined in the textbook. Essentially the information you have just highlighted or underlined in the text should answer your questions.
- Proceed with your study/reading of the text. Every time you decide to highlight or underline text material, assign it a number in the margin of the textbook next to the highlighted information. Put the same number in your notes and create a question about the information you have just highlighted or underlined