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TAKING NOTES FROM LECTURES

In college classes, lectures are still the primary way faculty deliver information to students. Progress has been made to make college a more collaborative learning process, but lectures are alive and well. Consequently, note taking is still the primary means of sorting, organizing, and processing this material. The best way to take good notes is to think of it as a multi-stage process as noted below.

- Taking notes during a lecture can be a frustrating job. Getting **organized** is a good way to start to deal with the rush of incoming information.
1. Use a standard size notebook. A loose-leaf three-ring binder is the best because it allows you to insert handouts and rearrange your own notes.
 2. Put a heading and a date on your notes for each day.
 3. Attend all lectures, even if attendance is not mandatory. Using someone else's notes can help, but it is no substitute for attending the lecture. When you hear the information, process it, and write it in your notes, you are already beginning to learn the information. Reinforcement of the information through review of your notes completes the learning process.
- An essential skill for good note taking is **good listening**. Most people believe that they are good listeners, but research has shown that most students do not listen well. So first of all, you should try to sharpen your listening skills.

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1. Try to prepare for each lecture by pre-reading the material in your text. You will find that you will understand the lecture better if you have some basic background. This preparation is one that very few students take seriously.

Before the lecture, you should read the assigned material. If you don't have time, still spend 5–10 minutes skimming the material before the lecture. This will help you identify the most relevant information from the lecture. If you can, quickly review your notes from the last class to give you better context. From time-to-time, review the course outline to see what topic you are focusing on. You will then be able to listen better to the upcoming lecture and be able to obtain important points that relate to other course information.

2. Sit near the front and center of the class. You will have the most direct communication with your professor, and you will less likely be distracted.

- You will need to develop **recording strategies** that work with different disciplines, instructors and their varying speeds, styles and methods of lecturing. While you can sometimes persuade an instructor to slow down or repeat something, in general, you have to find a way to take notes quickly.

1. During the lecture, watch for cues from the instructor as to what information is most relevant. Notice how the instructor has organized the material. If the organization is not logical to you, try to organize the material with headings yourself. If there are gaps in your notes, trade notes with classmates, or fill them in right after the class while your memory is fresh. And don't hesitate to stop your instructor and ask questions.

2. Learn to identify main points and not get bogged down in detail. Professors often give cues to what's important by repeating information, changing their voices or rate of delivery, listing items in order of importance, and, of course, by writing on the chalkboard.

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3. Be selective in note taking: don't write down every word the instructor says, although you should write down any information which the professor puts on the blackboard or overheads. One technique you can use to take better notes: develop a consistent set of abbreviations for use in note taking. Also, develop a comfortable way of identifying key concepts and ideas in textbooks.

- Finally, after the lecture, **review and edit** your notes within 24 hours. Studies have found that we can remember more things within that time period.

These tips will help you prepare to take good notes, but what about the actual notes themselves? What should your notebook look like after a lecture? Well, let's hope that it isn't full of doodles in the margins which would indicate that your mind had wandered. In general, it should look a little like an outline with clear main ideas (not labeled with Roman Numerals, of course) and some subpoints with a moderate amount of details and examples. There should probably be some white space so that you add notes from your text or from the next day's lecture.

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