

Listening, Note-taking, and Using Visual Organizers

Listening to a lecture and taking notes go hand in hand because note-taking is active listening. However, you cannot possibly write down everything the instructor says. Here are some suggestions for using your class time actively.

Listen for meaning

Pay attention not only to the words being spoken by your teacher but to the thoughts and messages they convey. Identify the main idea, concept or subject being addressed and the relating issues. Listen for explanations, descriptions and clarifications. Again, don't just hear the words. Listen to the meanings being communicated.

Adjust your note taking style to the lecture

Poor listeners try write down everything, believing a detailed outline and effective notes are the same thing. They get frustrated when they cannot see the meaning behind what they are writing down or they go to review their notes and don't understand the concepts that were taught in class. Effective listeners adjust their note-taking to the lecture style. They listen to what's important, they try to understand concepts and they take notes that clarify, organize and reiterated important details of the lecture.

Tackle difficult to understand material

Frequently, when a teacher starts to lecture on a topic or concept that is difficult to understand students stop listening. They are hearing what the teacher is saying but they are not processing the information they are hearing. Effective listeners tackle difficult material and expend the brain power required to process what they are hearing even when it is difficult.

Concentrate and pay attention

Poor listeners frequently are poor concentrators. Effective listening requires that you concentrate and pay attention. Remove all thoughts of home, friends, fun and ancillary activities from you head while the teacher is speaking. Learning to focus and concentrate will help you become an effective listeners and much more effective student.

Be prepared

It is difficult to listen and mentally process what you're hearing when you come to your class unprepared. If your teacher gives you a reading assignment or homework designed to prepare you to understand a topic its important that you are familiar with the topic before it is discussed in class. Being ready to listen means being prepared for each class ahead of time.

Focus on what's important

Poor listeners focus on fact. They may retain a few of those facts, but the information is usually garbled. Effective listeners focus on main ideas, fundamental concepts and vital issues. You may find that reading the text before class will provide you with an overview for the lecture. Some students find that by going to class first, they get a better sense of what is important and find it easier to focus on the lecture and recommendations of the instructor. You will need to determine **what works best for you** based on your learning style and the instructional style of your professor.

Regardless of when you read the text, listening with questions in your mind or written on paper will help you to stay focused on the lecture. Some questions you might want to ask include:

- What do you already know about the subject?
- What do you need to know?
- What are the main ideas?
- What are the important details?
- What are some oral cues I should be listening for, such as: examples, order of importance, sequence?
- How could I apply this?
- How does this relate to what I read in my textbook?
- What don't I understand about this?

Try to listen with an open mind. Don't jump to conclusions or make assumptions before you hear all the information.

It is a fact that we think at a much greater speed than the lecturer can speak. So you'll need to keep your mind focused. Taking notes will help you keep focused and provides the best way to record the information that is covered in class.

Note-Taking

Note-taking is the primary method for documenting and summarizing the important points covered in your classes. Because you will be dependent on your class notes for study, you want to be sure that you get as much of the information on paper as possible.

There are two basic ways to take notes:

Mapping allows you to capture the big picture. While limited in the amount that you can note, it can be used as a way to:

- Preview text.
- Preview chapters.
- Organize ideas before writing an essay.
- Take notes when the instructor tends to skip around

Cornell Notes allow you to outline main ideas and details to whatever extent you need to note the information. This format can be used to:

- Outline text.
- Organize writing for a term paper.
- Take notes when the instructor lectures in a step-by-step style.

In order to be sure that you have captured all the important points and to be certain that you can interpret your notes, you should always review your notes shortly after the class is over. In some cases, especially if you tend to be a "big picture" learner, you may want to team up with more "detailed" learners in your class.

Be creative when you review and edit your notes. Use highlighting, numbers, arrows or other symbols to clarify and evaluate the information. Combine notes from your text with your class notes. Ask more questions, such as, "What point or information might be included as a test question?"

Flashcards remain one of the best tools for memorizing information. The most common way to create flashcards is to use index cards. Students can simply write the question on one side and the answer on the opposite side and test themselves repeatedly. Flash cards can be used to help you learn important terms or concepts. That way you can start drilling yourself right away and can easily review these terms throughout the course. Don't be afraid to buddy up with a classmate and share flashcards!

Using Visual Organizers

The best way to fully understand new material is through the process of **elaboration**. The processes of rephrasing, applying, analyzing, and otherwise manipulating the information allow you to **understand at a deeper level and to make the information your own**.

You can help yourself to elaborate by using the chart showing questions at all cognitive levels. By asking and answering these questions, you process the information at high levels of thinking and better assure your understanding and ability to apply important concepts.

Another way to elaborate and to assist your memory is to organize the information into visual formats using visual organizers which include: illustrations, maps, tables, charts, webs, etc. The process of putting the information into these cognitive frames supports your understanding at high levels of cognition. Once information is in a visual format, you remember it more easily by "seeing" it in your mind's eye during testing or for application in the future.

By elaborating new information from your reading and lectures, you will learn the information more effectively and thoroughly; and you will find that you won't have to spend as much time preparing for test.