

STUDENT GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE NOTETAKING AND REVIEW

Good notetaking is much more than fast writing. Good notetakers listen actively while they write, think while they listen, and make conscious choices about what to record. In general, they capture as much of the lecture content as possible. They take notes they can use for effective learning, and then, most importantly, they *review* those notes regularly and with focused attention.

BEFORE CLASS

Do assigned readings.

- Check your syllabus.
- Reading before class will help you identify, understand, and organize main points and content in the lecture and class discussion.

DURING CLASS

Listen for structure.

- Listen for introductory and concluding phrases and transitions indicating how the lecture is organized (“Today’s topics will include...”).
- If the instructor begins lecture with questions, write them down, then listen for the answers.
- Listen for repetition.
- Listen as closely to the end of the lecture as to the beginning. The instructor may summarize the most important points (“Today we discussed...”).

AFTER CLASS

Review within 24 hours.

- Compare notes with classmates to supplement or clarify what you wrote down.
- Locate gaps or confusion. Ask peers, GSIs, or the instructor for help in class or during office hours.
- Check for accuracy of material (especially formulas, definitions, spelling of terms.).
- Identify connections with what you already know and with material from previous class meetings. How does the material extend or clarify your knowledge? What is the “big picture” that is starting to emerge?

Organize.

- Keep one notebook per course.
- Loose-leaf binders with pockets give more flexibility in organizing your notes and allow you to add handouts and other material in a useful order.

Be complete and accurate.

- Write down key points, theories, facts, theorems, definitions, etc.
- Write down examples and indicate the point(s) they demonstrate.
- Write down anything given in list form (“Three causes were...”).
- Write down what is written on the board or projected on screen.
- Pay attention to the instructor’s body language and tone of voice. Note when she or he uses the most emphasis or enthusiasm.
- Listen for main points, but generally, writing more is better.

Reorganize and rehearse.

- Reorganize your notes visually. Create an outline, diagram, or chart to show relationships among concepts.
- Use different pen colors or highlighters for different types of material, or to distinguish your ideas from the instructor’s.
- Try writing brief summaries of the information in your own words.
- Review your notes regularly to improve your understanding and to prevent cramming at test time.
- Make up and answer possible test questions.

Engage fully.

- Be positive about learning.
- Plan to start listening as soon as the instructor starts talking: tune in, have your pen and paper ready, do not let others distract you.

Keep up.

- Abbreviate! Every subject has words that can be shortened. For example, use **S.** for *Shakespeare*, **b/c** for *because*, **w/** for *with*, or **re:** for *regarding*.
- To save time, use a system of symbols. For example, use → for *resulted in*, = for *is equal to*, > for *is greater than*, ∴ for *therefore*. Develop your own symbols too.
- Leave space if you fall behind or get confused. Circle terms you do not understand. Write question marks next to places you want to clarify later, but do not stop taking notes.

Evaluate your method.

- Are you finding a lot of gaps and errors?
- Do your notes help you study? Did they help you on your exams? If not, what can you do to improve your notes?
- If you feel that your notes are not helping you learn, and you do not feel that you know how to improve them, seek the assistance of your instructor or GSI.