

A System for Effective Listening and Note-taking

The experts say that you can think about four times faster than a lecturer can speak. Effective listening requires the expenditure of energy; to compensate for the rate of presentation, you have to actively intend to listen. Note taking is one way to enhance listening, and using a systematic approach in the taking and reviewing of your notes can add immeasurably to your understanding and remembering the content of lectures.

Before Class

- Develop a mind-set geared toward listening.
- Test yourself over the previous lecture while waiting for the next one to begin.
- Skim relevant reading assignments to acquaint yourself with main ideas, new technical terms, etc.
- Do what you can to improve physical and mental alertness (fatigue, hunger, time of day, where you sit in the classroom all affect motivation).
- Choose notebooks that will enhance your systematic note-taking; a separate notebook with full-sized pages is recommended for each course.
- Intend to listen

During Class

- Listen for the structure and information in the lecture.
- Resist distractions, emotional reactions, or boredom.
- Be consistent in your use of form, abbreviation, etc.
- Pay attention to speaker for verbal, postural, and visual clues to what is important.
- Label important points and organizational clues: main points and examples.
- When possible translate the lecture into your own words, but if you cannot, do not let it worry you into inattention.
- If you feel you do not take enough notes, divide your page into five sections and try to fill each part every 10 minutes (or work out your own formula).
- Ask questions if you do not understand.
- Instead of closing your notebook early and getting ready to leave, listen carefully to information given toward the end of class; summary statements may be of particular value in highlighting main points; there may be other important material, possible quiz questions, etc.

After Class

- Clear up any questions raised by the lecture by asking either the instructor or classmates.
- Fill in missing points or misunderstood terms from text or other sources.
- Edit your notes, labeling main points, adding recall clues and questions to be answered. Key points in the notes can be highlighted with different colors of ink.
- Make note of your ideas and reflections, keeping them separate from those of the speaker.

Periodically

- Review your notes: glance at your recall clues and see how much you can remember before rereading the notes.
- Look for the emergence of themes, main concepts, methods of presentation over the course of several lectures.
- Make up and answer possible test questions.