



DOUGLAS COLLEGE

Douglas College Learning Centre

LECTURE NOTE-TAKING

Taking good lecture notes is essential in many college level courses because your notes are a written record of lecture material that you will need to know for tests. Also, the physical act of note-taking helps you start to put information into your memory because it is an active way for your brain to start processing the information which produces more effective learning than just passively listening to the instructor.

This handout offers many suggestions of how to improve your note-taking skills; **select the tips that you would like to try out**, and remember that note-taking is a skill that can be improved through better technique and with practice.

Before Class: Preparing to take notes

There are several useful things you can do before class that will make the note-taking process easier. These pre-class preparation steps are especially important for classes that provide a great deal of challenging new content:

1. Look at your course-outline to see what the topic of the lecture will be and start anticipating what might be discussed in class.
2. Quickly read over your notes from the previous class to refresh your memory and get mentally warmed-up for the new material to come.
3. If your lecture is based on textbook material, read your assigned chapter **BEFORE** class. Notice the new concepts, and especially the new terminology that you will be discussing in class so that you can spell/write the new terms effectively while taking notes. If you do not have time to read the entire chapter or all the assigned pages, skim the text for an overview of the topics and core concepts, and to identify key terms. This preparation for the lecture will help you take much better notes.
4. Get to class early so that you can choose where to sit, and so you hear the crucial opening summary of today's lecture. Choose a place to sit that allows you to listen and pay attention rather than be distracted.

During the Lecture: Tips for taking notes in class

1. Do not depend only on the PowerPoint notes that the instructor provides for a lecture. Passively sitting and reading already written notes does not help you pay attention to the lecture or start to learn the material as effectively as when you take your own notes.
2. Always date your notes in case they get out of order, and so you can match your notes to the course outline the instructor handed out on the first day.
3. Write on the front side of your paper only. This keeps notes cleaner and easier to study from so you can spread them out in front of you.
4. Leave lots of spaces in your notes for integrating missed information when you edit your notes later. A good practice is to leave a left margin at least 5 cm. wide, and leave about 7 cm. at the bottom of the page which you can use later when you edit and study your notes (see the example notes at the end of this handout).
5. Listen for the main ideas and core concepts covered in a lecture and make sure you note these down as headings.

Teachers often give clues when they state main ideas or important points. Some of the more common clues are:

- a) Introductions and/or summaries given at the start or end of class, such as "Today we will cover . . ."
 - b) Material is written on the board
 - c) Repetition - the same idea is presented several times
 - d) Emphasis - this can be judged by a louder tone of voice, slowing down and emphasizing a point, stronger gestures, and/or the amount of time a teacher spends on the topic
 - e) Word signals; e.g., "It is important to note that..."
6. DO NOT try to write down everything that is said as you will get left behind.

Keep up by:

- using your own words to reduce and summarize information
- using abbreviations and symbols (see the list at the end of this handout.)
- writing phrases instead of full sentences

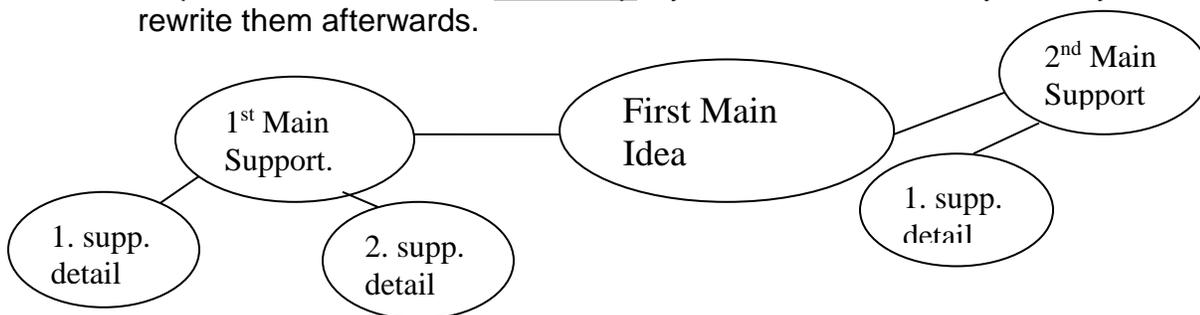
7. On the other hand, write down enough information so that you can understand your notes later. Some students make the mistake of not taking enough notes, and later they have trouble understanding them because they lack detail. The more complete your notes are, the easier they will be to study from later.

8. Leave gaps in your notes when moving from one idea or topic to the next. This makes it easier to see where one idea ends and another one starts, but it also gives space for making your notes more complete when you edit later.
9. When you miss information, leave a gap in your notes, catch up with the speaker, and fill in the missing information later by asking a friend, checking your textbook, or approaching the teacher.
10. Use a style of note-taking that will help you study later. Choose a style that leaves you space so that after the lecture you can add headings and key points and create review and study questions (see example at the end of this handout).
11. Adjust your note-taking to the type of lecture your instructor gives. If possible, take notes using the OUTLINE format. This involves a system of indenting information to show the relationship between main ideas, major supporting points and minor supporting details. This system is most useful when the lecture is presented in an organized fashion that moves from one point to the next.

Outline Format

- I. First Main Idea
 - A. First Main Supporting Point
 1. Supporting Detail
 2. Supporting Detail
 - B. Second Main Supporting Point
 1. Supporting Detail
- II. Second Main Idea

If your instructor moves from topic to topic and then back again, you may find it helpful to take notes in a mind-map style. However, this may mean you need to rewrite them afterwards.



12. Ask questions during class. This helps you stay alert and listen, and your notes will be clearer if you understand the lecture.

AFTER the lecture: Editing your notes

1. Take time to edit your notes soon after the class. Our brains forget quickly, so schedule time to edit your notes as soon as possible after the class. This will help you fill in gaps, identify where you still have questions, and have better notes to study from. Editing notes is not a waste of time because it is an effective form of studying. Each time you go over your notes, you help the information enter your long-term memory.

Some students recopy all their notes—to make them neater and as a way of studying. However, recopying everything is not always the best use of your time. It's often better to spend the time editing, noticing and highlighting main ideas and key points for emphasis, and rewriting only those points that need more clarification. This editing is a kind of studying because it helps you review, identify what is more important to remember, and consolidate your understanding of the material.

2. The best way to use your notes as a study aid is to view them at least 3 times before a test, once when you edit, once again at the end of a week when you review what you covered during the week, and a third time when you study for the test. This set of three, shorter reviews of your notes helps you learn more deeply and avoid having to cram the night before.
3. Use the left margin to anticipate and write possible exam questions (see the example notes at the end of this handout). Look at your notes and ask yourself “What question does this information answer?” When you have decided, write these questions next to the material in your notes. This way you create a question-answer system for studying.
4. Use the bottom section of your page to summarize the main concepts and most important details. You can do this when you edit your notes soon after the lecture. But you might find it works better to write the summary when you study before a test. Either way, the process of identifying and recording the main points will help you remember them, but it also helps you practice writing about the concepts, similar to responding to long answer questions on tests. It's simply good practice for the test.

Symbols for Note Taking

Every subject has its own terms and special language, so the symbols and abbreviations below are only a few examples. As well, it's important that you can recognize the abbreviations you use, so make a record the first time you use one, and try to use the ones you will remember easily.

Symbol	Meaning	Example
→	leads to, causes	smoking → lung cancer
↑	Increases, goes up	taxes ↑
∴	therefore	financial crisis ∴ stock fell
=	equal	inflation = higher prices
?	Note to ask instructor	
~	approximately	~ 2,000 people
&	and	crime & punishment
ψy	psychology	
%	percent	100 %
#	number	# 8
*	important	

Abbreviations for Note-taking

Abbreviation	Word
b/c	because
cf	compare
diff.	difference
e.g.	example
w/	with
w/o	without

Another way to shorten words is to leave out vowels from the middle of words.

Abbreviation	Word
bkgd	background
prblm	problem
estmt	estimate
amnt	amount
edn	education

Samples Notes

<p>What are arguments <u>for</u> GM foods?</p> <p>What are arguments <u>against</u> GM foods?</p> <p>How is GM food different from selective breeding?</p> <p>Define transgenic</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">month,day,year</p> <p><u>Genetically Modified Food</u></p> <p><u>Two views:</u></p> <p>1. Pro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - credible scientists claim next step in animal husbandry - not much dif from selective breeding - regulatory bodies to ensure safety <p>2. Con</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - credible sci. say not proven safe - world not short of food; prblm is distribution -not being regulated→public not aware of GM foods in stores <p><u>Ecological Impact of GM Foods</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -GM crops not like selective breeding - GM crops are "transgenic" - organisms contain DNA from other species e.g. - fish gene in strawberries to make cold resistant
<p>Summary: 2 views on whether GM foods are needed, safe, or different from past agricultural practices. GM foods "transgenic"—e.g. fish DNA in strawberries.</p>	