

Taking Lecture Notes

There are several relatively easy things you can do that will put you on the road to being successful in a

Current research supports these ideas and also shows that final results on exams and papers can be improved if certain methods for taking notes are employed.

Take notes by hand in a notebook. Significant research has demonstrated that typing notes on a computer is less effective than writing notes by hand in a notebook. So, put your computer (and phone) away, and get out your notebook.

Organization is key. Your notes should be written legibly and begin with the date and subject of the lecture. It is often best to write on every other line or to leave a large margin on at least one side of the page. This will allow you to add material later and to underline your notes and write additional comments without cluttering the page.

An outline is not a proper set of notes. If the professor hands out an outline or makes one available

and/or the assigned reading that illustrate the main points on that outline. Add relevant dates and names. Define terms used on the outline.

Do not try to write down every word the instructor says. The more time you devote to writing, the less attention you can give to understanding the main points and identifying the outline and argument of the lecture. You do not want every word of a lecture, but you do want every idea. You will need to process the subject matter in order to condense the lecture without losing the significant meaning. Taking notes is an exercise in abridgement and paraphrasing.

Develop your own shorthand. Never use a sentence when you can use a phrase or a phrase when you can use a word. Use abbreviations and symbols whenever possible. Why write out "popular sovereignty" when you could write "pop sov"? John C. Calhoun can become JCC, Abraham Lincoln AL, etc. Every note taker also develops short forms of words such as cd for could, wd for would, w/ for with, n for not, k for can, gd for good, etc. Start by using one or two such forms, and then gradually add more.

Complete reading assignments before class. This allows you to develop an overview of the main ideas, secondary points, and definitions for important concepts. If everything the instructor says is new to you, you will spend so much time writing that you may not be able to grasp the theme of the lecture. If you have obtained some basic information from the reading, however, you will be able to concentrate on noting points in the lecture that are new or different.

Watch for clues from the instructor. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) (11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17) (18) (19) (20) (21) (22) (23) (24) (25) (26) (27) (28) (29) (30) (31) (32) (33) (34) (35) (36) (37) (38) (39) (40) (41) (42) (43) (44) (45) (46) (47) (48) (49) (50) (51) (52) (53) (54) (55) (56) (57) (58) (59) (60) (61) (62) (63) (64) (65) (66) (67) (68) (69) (70) (71) (72) (73) (74) (75) (76) (77) (78) (79) (80) (81) (82) (83) (84) (85) (86) (87) (88) (89) (90) (91) (92) (93) (94) (95) (96) (97) (98) (99) (100)