

THIS ACADEMIC TIP SHEET:

- explains the purpose of university lectures and why you should attend them
- provides effective note-taking strategies
- provides practical solutions to common problems

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF LECTURES?

Lectures create an opportunity to teach a large number of students simultaneously. But they don't teach you all you need to know about the subject. You're expected to supplement your learning from lectures through independent study and by participating in tutorials, workshops, etc.

Lectures will:

- give you insight into what the lecturer considers important
- alert you to the key concepts, theories and issues in the subject
- provide a catalyst for you to think critically about the subject
- expose you to debates and controversies dealt with in the literature

DO I NEED TO ATTEND LECTURES?

Most lecturers design their classes to complement rather than replace the lecture materials they give to students. If you don't attend lectures, you may miss crucial information like:

- what the lecturer is expecting in an assignment
- classroom discussions that help to clarify topics or issues
- anecdotes that the lecturer may provide to aid your learning

Note: If you miss the occasional lecture please make an effort to find out what you've missed by talking to the lecturer, the tutor and/or a few classmates.

NOTE-TAKING IN LECTURES

Taking notes from lectures and readings helps you maintain concentration. It also reinforces your understanding and retention of material and provides a useful reference for revision purposes.

To improve your note-taking skills, adopt these strategies before, during and after lectures.

Before the lecture

- Check the unit outline to establish the topic of the lecture.
- Do the pre-reading to gain an orientation to the topic.
- Read the lecture plan/outline if this is available beforehand.

- Familiarise yourself with key terms to facilitate listening and understanding.
- Arrive early to collect handouts and find a seat where you can see and hear clearly.

During the lecture

- Work out how the lecture content is organised (usually provided in the 'outline' at the start of the lecture). Use this structure to organise your notes into sections using headings.
- Pay attention to visual cues. Maintain eye contact with the lecturer and look up at the projector screen/whiteboard regularly.
- Use active listening techniques to reinforce your ability to process the information you're seeing and hearing, such as:
 - verbal cues (intonation patterns, repetition)
 - examples and anecdotes used to illustrate a point
 - language signposts (words that show the line of reasoning), e.g. in contrast, similarly, unlike, in agreement, an opposing viewpoint, before, in addition, the first
 - formulate questions as you think about the content, e.g. What are the benefits/pitfalls/criticisms? What are other examples? How does it work?

After the lecture

- Scan through your lecture notes.
- Do the relevant readings (in detail) and supplement your notes.
- Review your notes to consolidate your understanding.
- As part of your ongoing revision, prepare an overall summary of key points (1-2 pages should suffice).

NOTE-TAKING TECHNIQUES

To make your note-taking more efficient, use the following techniques:

- As a header, write the unit code, topic, lecturer's name and date, before you begin taking notes.
- Use wide margins and leave lines between sections so you can add details later.
- Use headings and numbering to separate the ideas.
- Write in phrases rather than whole sentences.
- Use abbreviations and symbols, especially for commonly-used terms.
- Use a combination of your own words and those of the lecturer.
- Write down key references to refer to later.
- Use tables, charts, graphs, figures, etc. to record information concisely.
- Use a different coloured pen to highlight important aspects.

COMMON LECTURE CHALLENGES: Q&A

Q: "I'm not sure what to write"

A: Pre-reading should assist you in identifying the key concepts and ideas. Listen for these and write down the relevant words and phrases to capture the explanation.

Q: "I have difficulty listening and writing at the same time"

A: By training yourself to jot down a few key words and phrases as you listen, you'll become more efficient at using all of these skills together.

Q: "How do I make sense of my lecture notes?"

A: Use the lecture slides to create organisation and hierarchy of ideas, and improve clarity and structure in your notes. Review your notes as soon after the lecture as possible.

Q: "How do I stop daydreaming, not concentrating?"

A: Try sitting at the front or in a spot where there are few distractions. Pay attention to the verbal cues to track the progress of the lecture. If you miss part of a section, this will help you 'quickly tune in again'. Writing notes as you listen usually improves concentration.

Q: "What if I can't understand the lecture content?"

A: Pre-read before each lecture. Complete the required homework tasks. Ask questions when given the opportunity. If necessary, approach the lecturer to arrange an individual appointment for assistance.

Q: "What should I do with the lecture slides and handouts?"

A: If the slides and handouts are available beforehand, download these and use them when preparing for the lecture.

You may also decide to use these materials to organise your notes. Either print the slides as handouts and annotate these as you listen to the lecture, or write on a separate sheet of paper.

LECTURE CHECKLIST

- Did you attend the lecture?
- Have you completed the pre-reading and other preparation?
- Did you collect the lecture slides and handouts?
- Were you attentive during the lecture?
- Did you take effective notes during the lecture?
- Did you follow up the lecture with further study?
- If you missed the lecture did you find out what happened?

WANT HELP WITH YOUR STUDY?

Please contact our Academic Skills Centre to find out how we can assist you.

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