

Lectures

Academic Tip Sheet



This academic tip sheet:

- explains the purpose of lectures within the university;
- explains why you should attend lectures;
- reviews effective note taking strategies; and
- provides practical solutions to common problems that occur.

What's the purpose of lectures?

Lectures create an opportunity to teach a large number of students simultaneously. Lectures however, do not teach you all you need to know about the subject. Students are expected to supplement their learning from lectures by independent study and 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; and
- sensitise 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 make available to students. Not attending lectures may mean that you:

- miss crucial information (e.g. what the lecturer is expecting in an assignment);

- miss out on the richness of classroom discussions; and
- miss out on anecdotes that the lecturer may provide to aid your learning.

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

Note taking

Taking notes from lectures and readings:

1. Helps maintain concentration.
2. Reinforces understanding and retention of material.
3. Provides a useful learning resource for revision purposes.

Note taking in lectures

To improve your note taking skills adopt these strategies:

Before the lecture

- Refer to the unit outline to establish the topic of the lecture.
- Do the relevant pre-reading to gain an orientation to the topic.
- Read the lecture plan/outline if this is available beforehand.
- Familiarise yourself with key terms as this facilitates 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). Typically the lecture will have an introduction, middle, and conclusion. 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 from time to time).
- Use active listening techniques to reinforce your ability to process the information you are seeing and hearing, for example:
 - Verbal cues (intonation patterns, repetition).
 - Examples & anecdotes used to illustrate a point.
 - Language signposts – i.e. 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 (Keep it concise, 1-2 pages should suffice).

What to do with lecture slides and handouts?

If the slides and handouts are available before the lecture, download these and use them when preparing for the lecture. You may also decide to use these materials to organise your notes. You can either print the slides as handouts and you can then annotate these as you listen to the lecture, or you can write on a separate sheet of paper.

Note taking techniques

To make your note taking more efficient, try to 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 very important aspects.

Common problems in lectures

Below are some suggested strategies for dealing with common difficulties.

Not sure what to write

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.

Difficulty listening and writing at the same time

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

Can't make sense of your notes later

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.

Daydreaming (poor concentration)

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 enable you to 'quickly tune in again'. Writing notes as you listen usually improves concentration.

Can't understand the lecture content

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.

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?**

References

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