



Douglas College

Douglas College Learning Centre

LECTURE NOTETAKING

Taking good lecture notes is a difficult but essential skill as your notes act, first and foremost, as a written record of lecture material that you will study from later. The act of note-taking itself helps to keep you focused on what is being said and starts to put information into memory.

Preparing to take notes

There are several useful things you can do before class that will make the note-taking process easier:

- a) Look at your course-outline to see what the topic of the lecture will be and start anticipating what might be discussed in class.
- b) Quickly read over your notes from the previous class to refresh your memory and get mentally warmed-up for the new material to come.
- c) If your lecture is based on textbook material, read your assigned chapter BEFORE class. This will introduce you to ideas and concepts that you will be discussing in class.
- d) Get to class early so that you can sit front and centre. This position enables you to engage with the instructor and ask questions more easily.

Taking notes in class

1. Always date your notes in case they get out of order.
2. Write on the front side of your paper only. This keeps notes cleaner and easier to study from as you can lay them out in front of you.
3. Leave a 2" working margin which you will use for studying your notes later. Do not write in this margin while note-taking.
4. Listen for the main ideas and topics covered in a lecture and make sure you get these down in the form of a heading. If you miss the main ideas, the details that you get down become confusing because you don't know what ideas or key points they are developing.

Teachers often give clues to what is the main idea or key point. Some of the more common clues are:

- a) Material is written on the board
 - b) Repetition - the same idea is presented several times
 - c) Emphasis - this can be judged by tone of voice and gesture and/or the amount of time a teacher spends on the topic
 - d) Word signals; e.g., "It is important to note that..."
 - e) Introductions and/or summaries given at the start or end of class.
5. Write down an adequate amount of supporting detail. Students often make the mistake of not taking enough notes. The more complete your notes are, the easier they will be to study from later.
 6. 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.
 7. DO NOT try to write down everything that is said as you will get left behind. Keep up by:
 - reducing and summarizing information
 - writing it in your own words
 - using abbreviations, symbols, and part words (e.g., org. = organization)
 - writing phrases instead of full sentences
 8. If you do 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.
 9. 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.

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

What to do with your notes AFTER class

1. Do not spend a great deal of time re-copying your notes. This is not a good use of your time. Instead, EDIT your notes as soon after class as possible. Highlight main ideas and key points for emphasis, add any missing information, and/or rewrite points for clarification. Always ask yourself “will these notes make sense to me in several weeks time when the material is no longer fresh in my memory?”
2. Use the 2" working margin to anticipate and write possible exam questions. Look at you 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 learning your notes.