

Lecture Success: Tips for Note Taking

HCTC Student Success Tools

1. Before the lecture – Prepare to take notes

- ◆ Read assigned material and complete assignments.
- ◆ Bring the best equipment:
 - 8 ½ x 11 loose leaf paper
 - 3-ring binder
 - Pen/Pencil
- ◆ Sit in a distraction-free location:
 - As close as possible to front and center of classroom
 - Away from windows/doors
 - Apart from “talkers,” noise makers, sleepers
 - Resist temptation of sitting with chatty friends
- ◆ Do a 3-minute, pre-class warm-up:
 - Look over notes from the last class
 - Scan assigned reading from text
 - Have questions in mind

2. During the Lecture – listening habits

- ◆ Listen to understand:
 - Get ideas
 - Assess their importance
 - Connect them to other information
 - If you disagree, note your disagreement and let it go
- ◆ Focus on content NOT delivery:
 - Ignore personal quirks of lecturer
 - Try to understand lecturer’s purpose
- ◆ Observe and listen for cues:
 - Introductory remarks
 - Summarizing or transitional statements such as:
 - “the most important consideration...”
 - “in summary...”
 - “the following three factors...”
 - “all in all...”
 - Repetition
 - Notice lecturer’s voice changes, facial expressions, and body language – indicate interest level and importance, enthusiasm, excitement vs. fundamental delivery
 - Watch lecturer’s eye movements – looking at notes for extra important information
 - Watch the board/screen – copy down as much information as possible

3. During the Lecture – Writing tips

- ◆ Use a two column format
 - 1/3 – 2/3 design
 - Write on only one side of the paper
- ◆ Write in “formatted prose.”
 - Use Roman numerals OR capital letters to indicate main points
 - indent to indicate supporting details beneath main points

Information Processing (INP)

- leave plenty of “white space” especially when lecturer changes points
- ◆ Use common abbreviations and develop your own. Be consistent. For example:
 - w/ with
 - w/o without
 - + and
 - ± more or less
 - = equals
 - _ does not equal
 - < less than
 - > greater than
 - _ increase(s)
 - _ decrease(s)
 - ∴ therefore
 - e.g. or ex example
 - vs. versus, against
 - # number, pounds
 - @ approximately
 - etc. and so on
 - avg. average
- ◆ Use a “lost” signal—“huh???”
- ◆ Use key words, pictures, and diagrams.
- ◆ Create a graphic interface with stars, arrows, brackets, underlines
- ◆ Be flexible – adapt your note taking style to the lecturer and subject matter:
 - Switch to paragraphs
 - Use note cards
 - Use maps/diagrams/charts
 - Use a tape recorder only as BACK-UP
- ◆ Use TV note-taking for practice.
- ◆ Avoid tape recorders – they tempt you to mentally relax.
- ◆ When the instructor talks too fast:
 - Leave large spaces for filling in what you miss
 - Make choices about what to write – watch/listen for main points and fill in details later.
 - Exchange photocopies of notes with classmates you trust.
 - See the instructor after class
 - Ask the instructor to slow down and/or repeat information

4. After the Lecture – Edit, Question, Review

- ◆ Go over notes AS SOON AS POSSIBLE after lecture, within 24 hours at most.
 - Clarify
 - Delete/Add
 - Fix words that are illegible
 - Write out abbreviated words that might be unclear later
 - Add organization with graphic symbols (arrows, brackets, etc.)
 - Type out notes and print for easy reading
- ◆ Create cues and questions:
 - Use 1/3 column
 - Focus on main concepts and some key details.
 - Supplement with material from text.
 - Highlight answers.