How to Survive…..
Listening and note-taking

Having trouble taking meaningful notes while listening to a lecture? The good news is that there are three things you can do right now to make a big difference to the quality of your notes:

1. **Understand** why you take notes;
2. **Apply** some of the strategies offered in this guide; and
3. **Evaluate** your note-taking on a regular basis.

**Why take notes?**

The quantity and type of notes you take will vary depending on the purpose of the lecture and your reason for taking notes. You might be taking notes to use as revision for an exam, to keep you awake during the lecture and to help you focus on the major issues, or to keep track of new terminology and concepts.

Think about why you are taking notes and what kind of notes you will need to achieve that purpose. Try not to take notes out of habit.

**Strategies for better notes**

- Be selective in what you write down. Look for the **verbal cues** the lecturer uses: for example, “I want to emphasise that….” “Most importantly….”
- Summarise the points made using your own words (no need to copy everything down verbatim).
- Get to the lecture on time so that you don’t miss the outline many lecturers offer at the beginning.
- Come prepared. If you have done the **required reading** the lecture will make more sense and you will take better notes.
- Be organized: list the title of the lecture, date, and number the pages. Keep notes in sequence and all in one place.
- Use headings and subheadings, underlining, arrows, asterisks etc to help you remember what is important and why and to map the relationships between ideas.
• Use abbreviations (you don’t need to know shorthand – you can invent your own!)

Things to avoid!

1. Do not try to write everything down. Firstly it is impossible and secondly a transcript is likely to be a burden later on. **Quality is better than quantity.**

2. As long as you can read your notes there is **no need to worry about neatness.**

3. Don’t pay so much attention to your notes that you forget to listen to the lecture. Less notes and more listening is best. **It is better to leave the lecture having understood it than to have a sheaf of notes but no real idea of what it was about.**

Evaluation

• After the lecture read through your notes and edit where necessary. Make connections, summarise, confirm the main argument, expand, add diagrams, note where you need to follow up, etc.

• Compare notes with peers and evaluate significant differences.

• Take time to review the effectiveness of your notes. Do they do what you wanted them to do? Do you use them as you had planned? Are there gaps? Are they too detailed or not detailed enough?

Tips!

1. Try to think of your note-taking as **note-making**; after all, you are making these notes for your use.

2. You select what to include and leave out, and what to add so that your notes have meaning for you.

3. **Note-taking is an active task.** It is NOT a test of your ability to passively copy everything down.

Other useful resources:

Other Survival Guides – “Understanding Lectures” “Effective Reading”


BOOK – Wong, L. Essential Study Skills (LL&RS Resource Area SS200)


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