

How to Take Notes

"He listens well who takes notes." -- Dante Alighieri

On the surface, taking notes in class seems simple. You go to class, write in your notebook and leave, but when it comes time to do your homework (or worse yet, take a test) your notes don't make any sense and you're lost. Taking good notes involves being an active listener and participant in class, because the information your instructor provides is important. A little bit of extra attention and organizing during class each week can help you prepare for final assignments and tests.

BEFORE CLASS

- **Do Your Homework.** Your instructor will assume you have completed assignments prior to class, and will probably structure your class discussions around previously assigned material. Your notes will be more helpful and accurate if you have a base knowledge of each lecture topic.
- **Bring the Right Supplies.** Make sure you have a couple of sharp pencils or pens with plenty of ink, and enough paper to write on for the whole class period. You don't want to be out of paper when the instructor decides to review important material at the end of class.
- **Pick a Good Seat.** The closer you are to the front of the room, the harder it is to get distracted or fall asleep. Sitting up front will help focus your attention and make it easier to read the board or hear the instructor.
- **Refresh Your Memory.** Take a few minutes before class to review your notes from the last lecture. This will help you remember what you've covered and get you ready for the new information your instructor is going to provide.

DURING CLASS

- **Try to Write Neatly.** Using abbreviations or shorthand is fine, but try to keep things neat. Your notes are useless if you can't read and understand them.
- **Avoid Daydreaming.** If you notice your mind is wandering off take a deep breath, stretch, and refocus on the task before you. Forget about the errands you need to run or homework for other classes. Your only concern during class should be observing and collecting as much information as possible.
- **Write Key Points.** Be alert for repetition. If your instructor mentions something more than once or says a certain concept is important you will probably see it on a test. If your instructor takes the time to write something on the board then you should too.

AFTER CLASS

- **Take Notes When Reading.** Taking notes doesn't end when class does. Write down keywords, concepts and questions when you're doing your homework. These notes will help you absorb reading material and prepare for the next class meeting.
- **Write a Summary.** After you've completed your reading try to summarize what you've read. The summary should be brief (a small paragraph is usually enough) and should provide a broad overview of what you've learned.
- **Create an Outline.** Organize your notes so similar concepts so it's easier to see the relationship between major points and supporting ideas. Start with major topics, then work your way down to key points that relate to each topic. Outlines can give you quick access to class material when you need to study for tests and final exams.

Still struggling with concepts in class? Contact the SLC to learn more about tutoring services.

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