

Language & Learning Skills Unit

Note-taking from lectures

Some helpful hints on taking notes in lectures

At the beginning of the lecture record the date, lecturer's name and the topic.

Try to put the lecture into a context by asking:

- What is the lecture about?
- How does it relate to the course as a whole?
- What can I expect to learn today?
- Will the lecture contain material I will be examined on?

Watch the lecturer's body language for points of emphasis. Lecturers may:

- lean forward
- speak more loudly
- tap or pound the lectern
- underline what is on the whiteboard.

These cues will help you decide what is important.

In order to reflect the lecturer's key points in your notes, you need to make good use of the space on your paper. You can:

- separate important ideas
- put different points on different lines
- consider using a split page
- try not to write down everything
- jot down overhead or whiteboard summaries
- underline words and phrases.

The split page

A split page can help you to focus on the most important parts of the lecture. In the example below, imagine you have attended a lecture on note-taking. The key summary points on note-taking are in the left hand column, the most important information is in the right.

Your page might look like this:

Date	February 20 th 2007
Topic	Note-taking in lectures
Major things to watch for	The topic, the point of view of the lecturer, a summary outline of the major ideas, examples of points, the lecturer's body language.
Layout	Use a split page to distinguish ideas from examples, separate lines for new ideas.

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Other note-taking tools	Use arrows and circles to link and connect ideas
What to focus on	Listen for key words, note key dates, mark examples of theories or ideas, listen for structural pointers such as: <i>firstly, the main purpose, the effect of, as a consequence, to sum up, there are four examples of, expert A was the main proponent of ...</i>

You can not write down all a lecturer says. Try to select the most important points.

Taping Lectures

While taping lectures is useful, you may become less focused. Listening to tapes is a valuable review process but should not replace listening attentively in the initial lecture. When you tape lectures you are often less focused and you will need to go home and listen again.

Other things to consider

Is the lecture material relevant to assessment tasks?

If you are going to be examined on the lecture content try to swap notes with friends. It can be useful to have more than one view of what is heard.

You may need to go home and read through your notes. You may recall things that you didn't have time to write, fill in blank spaces or look up references, ideas, names or words referred to in the lecture.

Why take lecture notes?

The process of taking notes is at least as important as the lecture. Taking notes

- helps you to focus on the lecture
- aids concentration and ensures active learning
- helps you to distinguish between ideas and evidence, main points and examples
- helps you to learn to summarise.

When taking lecture notes, avoid distractions. If the people near you are talking, or you can't see the overheads, move.