Taking Notes in Lecture

Before Lecture

1. Do some background reading. Make sure you know what the topic of the lecture is going to be and do any suggested reading. Make sure if you have online information that you have read it before the lecture. If you have any questions about the topic of the lecture write them down and take them along.

2. Work out how this particular lecture fits into the overall structure of the unit or chapter; understand what information you need to from it and where you will go next.

3. Look at handouts. Your instructor may have lecture notes or PowerPoint handouts available on their website or Moodle. You may want to print out these lecture notes or slides and use them as the basis for your own notes. You can highlight or annotate handouts with your own ideas and thoughts.

During Lecture

1. Arrive early. Don’t miss the very beginning of a lecture since that is often the most valuable part because it often includes a review from previous lectures or outlines objectives for the current lecture. If you easily get distracted by other students, sit near the front.

2. Label your notes. Include the title and date of the lecture - and keep track of your page numbers. This will help you find information later on when it comes to revising for exams or writing assignments.

3. Make your own notes. Don’t rely entirely on a recording or notes written by friends because by writing your own notes you will improve your understanding and retention.

4. Organize your notes. Leave plenty of space in the margins so that you can easily add to your notes later. Use a ring-binder for your notes so that you can add material close to the notes on the relevant lecture. Write on only one side of the page.

5. Do not attempt to write everything down. It is impossible and unnecessary to reproduce the contents of a lecture exactly. Your notes should be an interpretation of the material presented. Try to follow and capture the logic of the argument or key points of information. Use headings and sub-headings in your notes to make this clear. Lecturers often provide explicit guidance as to the structure and format their lecture will follow. Look out for phrases such as ‘there are three key reasons for x’ or “it is essential to note that y”.

During Lecture (continued)

6. **Indicate any points you do not understand.** Follow up these questions through individual research, in study groups or during your instructor’s office hours.

7. **Include meaningful details.** Doing so increased the likelihood that that your notes will make sense to you when you review. Write down any specific examples given that will help you remember key points and sufficiently label graphs, tables or charts.

8. **Don’t leave early.** The last 10 minutes or so of a lecture is when the instructor may help you enormously by repeating points, drawing out conclusions and summarizing material.

After Lecture

1. **Look up new terms** - check spelling, meaning and appropriate use.

2. **Review your notes** as soon as possible after the lecture. These notes should provide the foundation upon which your understanding can be built. Here are some useful questions you can ask yourself about your notes:
   - Have you accurately recorded all main points?
   - How were these developed?
   - How do they relate to each other?
   - Which issues were clarified for you?
   - What will be discussed in the next lecture?
   - How could the material be summarized into only one paragraph?
   - Jot down questions you still have and talk about these in classes.

3. **Reflect on your notes.** Lectures are not an end in themselves but a means to understanding. Since they are usually a one-way process, using and discussing your notes with other students will help you understand your lectures more fully.

4. **Avoid recopying** your notes several times to make them neater—this usually wastes time, and can be avoided by making good notes in the first place. However, it is sometimes useful to type up your lecture notes because this can help you reflect on the lecture and reinforce what you’ve learned.