

Study Aids – Notetaking on Lecture

The best way to prepare for an exam is to make sure that you have all the notes you need, in the best order possible that will help you study. Begin by making sure that you have notes for each day of class. You should keep all of the notes for that class together in a binder or notebook, or in separate word processing files in the same class folder, along with all other class materials.

But simply keeping lecture notes is not enough if those notes are not useful. It is important to consider HOW you take notes on class lecture (or on the readings). Good notetaking is a combination of thoughtful listening, sorting through what is important and what is not necessary, and then recording the most important information. It is also very important to consider how you will be tested or how you will use lecture materials, so that notes can be helpful when it comes time to study. Coordinating how you take notes with the exams (that is, taking notes differently for some classes than others) is better than simply doing the same thing all the time.

Different students have different methods for notetaking. Here are six suggestions that may help:

Suggestions for Taking Notes:

- 1) Do the reading before you come to lecture. At least skim it so you'll have a better idea of what the lecture will be about. If there are any specific readings for that day, be sure to read them.
- 2) Follow the outline given in the lecture. Don't try to write down every word the lecturer says. Separate the main points from the illustrations and anecdotes. You should be able, at the end of lecture, to explain from your notes what the main ideas are for each big point on the lecture outline. See also part 6, reviewing, below.
- 3) Listen for cues from the speaker that indicate very important materials: "A major result is..." or "An important point is..." serves as a verbal cue for you to write. Ideas which are repeated are usually more significant.
- 4) Take your notes on one part of a page only. This leaves room for you to add material or study notes when you go back and re-read your notes later. That extra space will be handy, particularly if you are writing your notes in outline form (rather than in whole paragraphs) and you want to add examples from your readings to your lecture notes.
- 5) Use symbols and abbreviations in your notes, and be sure that you know what they mean when you have to study them later (example: for a lecture on Erasmus, "E" could stand for Erasmus throughout your notes that day.) However, don't abbreviate so heavily that you can't understand what you meant later.
- 6) After taking notes in a lecture, *read them over within a few hours of the lecture. This is extremely important.* Studies show that most people lose the memory of about 80% of a one-hour lecture within 24 hours. If you read over your notes and correct them (by adding information or correcting the outline, inserting any questions you might have), you will constantly be reviewing

the information and will be more likely to remember the material for the long haul. One good way to do so is to write a full sentence for each major point in the lecture outline, explaining the main point or most important argument. In addition, you ought to read over the last lecture's notes before you take notes on the new lecture. This can give you a sense of continuity as you listen to the subject being discussed.

Note-Taking and Exam Review: One of the purposes of note-taking is to provide a means to review for exams. The more you process the lecture at the time it is given, the more likely you will have a useable set of notes to review. One common error is to try to act as if you are a recorder trying to write everything the lecture says—this is not the way to take notes, which should involve active thinking, not mere recording. Notes which are too vague and short are just as bad as overly detailed, word-for-word notes which provide a mass of unprocessed details. Strive for a middle ground which combines important information with the main themes, arguments, or ideas of a lecture. Be sure to highlight these in your notes, so when it comes time to review, the notes will already be partially processed, with key information very noticeable.