

How to Make Effective Lecture Notes

Making effective notes during lectures is crucial to the understanding and retention of information. You will attend many lectures/tutorials/seminars over the course of your degree, so it is important to keep a good, organised record of what you learn. **Never** throw away notes; you never know when they will come in handy!

The following are some helpful hints about how to make effective notes during lectures:

What is Your Aim?

- What do you want to get out of the lecture?
- Do you have an assignment coming up?
- What is it?

Answering these questions will really help to motivate your listening and note-making skills.

Prepare Before Class:

- Read any required readings.
- Quickly read notes from the previous class to refresh your memory of the subject matter.
- Become familiar with any technical jargon.

Be Organised:

- Using A4 paper, start a new page for every lecture.
- Ensure to write the date and page numbers on all pages.
- Until you get to know your lectures, make a note of the lecturer's name too!
- Don't keep notes on oddly shaped pieces of paper.
- Keep notes and handouts in order and in one place (a lever arch file is best).

Listen Actively:

- Be attentive to, focused and critically engaged with what is being said in class.
- Ask yourself: 'Do I agree?', 'Why might this be?', 'Is this always the case?'
- Although difficult to do, try to ignore any distractions.

Make Notes:

- Don't take down verbatim every word spoken by the lecturer. Only take down the most important ideas. Lectures usually give clues! Listen out for the following:
- Reviews given at the beginning of class
- Use rhetorical questions or word signals such as 'firstly...', 'secondly...' and 'finally...', 'There are three major categories of...', or 'Why did this happen?'
- Summaries given at the end of class
- Material written on the slides/blackboard
- Information that is repeated or emphasised
- Use the Cornell note-making system (see below) to record important information covered in the lecture.
- Think and Rethink
- Connect information to personal experience, to concrete ideas or other material encountered elsewhere.
- Jot down possible questions raised by what is being said.
- Think about the possible strengths and weaknesses of the new concepts you encounter.

Be Open:

- Don't let your own values/views obscure your ability to listen.

Don't Panic!

- If you miss a statement, write down key words and get the information later (from your lecturer, a classmate or textbook).

Cornell Note-Making System:

Draw a wide margin on the left-hand side of your page, however don't bring this line down to the end of the page; leave the last 4-6 lines blank. The larger space on the right is the main Note-Making Area, while the area on the left is known as the Cue Column. The empty space at the bottom of the page is the Summary.

This format provides the perfect opportunity for using the 6 R's of note-making:

1. Record

During your lecture, record as much important information as you can in the Note-Making Area. However, do not write any notes in the Cue Column at this time. Remember to write clearly and use symbols and abbreviations where possible. Be sure to mark your own thoughts with a special symbol or use a different colour.

2. Reduce

Within 24 hours of your lecture review your notes. Highlight important headings, terminology or key people/dates. Use the Cue Column to reduce your notes to key words, phrases or questions. These then act as memory cues; making it easier for you to recall information helps you to prepare for exams gradually. Remember to keep adding to the Cue Column as you progress through your course.

3. Recite

Cover the Note-making Area, use the cues from the Cue Column to help you recall and recite out loud and in your own words what the lecture was about. Then look at your notes to see that what you recited was correct. Doing this will help your long-term memory.

4. Reflect

Thinking about the information you have learned helps you to better understand your course. Linking key themes and topics from various modules will develop your critical thinking skills and give you deeper understanding of your course. Don't forget to add any connections or thoughts you may have in the Cue Column!

5. Review

Spend approximately 10 minutes each week reviewing your notes. Do so by reciting them, not by re-reading them! You will retain most of the important concepts and topics!

6. Re-summarise

In the Summary section, use your own words to summarise the main points you want to remember. This practice helps to strengthen your memory and is a great way to review notes just before an exam.