

Top tips for note taking



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1. Anticipate the lecture.

Completing your required readings and reviewing any available course notes before class is beneficial in preparing you for what your professor will be discussing. This will allow you to connect to previous thoughts about the material, enhancing retention and improving your memory.

2. Enhance your physical and mental alertness.

Get in the mindset for listening. When you get in the classroom, choose a spot where you will have a clear, unobstructed view of the speaker – front and centre is best. Minimize distractions and turn off electronic devices.

3. Have the right tools for note taking.

In addition to pens and paper, you may also want to consider taking highlighters for main points, a ruler to divide your page, correction fluid and a mini hole-punch to keep any handouts organized in your binder. If you use a laptop, be sure your battery is fully charged.

4. Listen for the structure and format of the lecture.

At the beginning of a semester, before you know each professor's routines, pay attention for indications about when breaks are allowed and when questions can be asked. If these things are unknown, they could serve as a potential distraction.

5. Ask questions.

If you have a question relating to the lecture topic(s), ask your professor. Asking questions will help you to understand and remember the course material.

6. Use an effective note-taking format.

The two-column Cornell Note Method is one of the most effective methods for taking in-class notes. It involves splitting your paper into two columns: one for key words and headings and the other for the details that accompany them. For more information on this method, visit Student Academic Learning Services (SALS) or SALS ONLINE.

7. Watch and listen for cues.

Everything you learn in class is important but some things may be more important than others. If your professor repeats or emphasizes certain points in any way, make note of it. You will be more aware of what is most likely to be on a test.

8. Avoid word-for-word notes.

As much as you can, copy down information from lectures in your own words. It is easier to recall something that you created than to remember something in someone else's words.

9. Review your notes.

The key to enhancing information recall is to repeat the information over and over. You should review your notes no longer than 24 hours after the lecture, and continue to review for three or four days to maximize your recall.

10. Use the academic support available.

Visit SALS for more information about note-taking techniques that can save you time and help you retain content.