

Make Lectures Meaningful

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The most important aspect of going to lecture is the information you gain by attending—information you can't get elsewhere. And the best evidence that you've gained anything is having useful and complete notes. This handout will provide some advice about what you should be getting out of lectures as well as methods for improving your ability to take useful notes.

What are lectures for?

Lectures are where professors focus your attention on those topics that are most relevant for the course, and where they show you how to think about those topics so you will succeed.

Thus, there are two major responsibilities in lecture:

- Identify the important topics and other relevant material.
- Be able to understand the important topics in the manner the professor intends.

There are many good ways to prepare for lecture:

- Review notes from previous lectures. Check the syllabus to see what's ahead.
- Skim assigned material before going to class. If you read more intensely, be sure to also take notes on the readings.
- Talk about the material to your peers or the professor outside of class.

Consider the material and the method in which the material is presented.

- Was a concept merely defined or was the history and development of it presented?
- Knowing why the professor is teaching a certain way is critical to understanding.

How can I get this information into my notes?

Practice the habits of a successful student:

- Sit near the front of the class.
- Sit by yourself rather than near distracting friends.
- Observe classroom dynamics, including peer-peer and peer-professor interactions.
- Talk to classmates and the professor about the material outside of class.
- Leave a large margin and lots of space in your notes in order to add to them later. Make sure your note taking style matches the needs of the course.

Try to improve your understanding:

- Take notes on the readings and review them before lecture.
- Familiarize yourself with key words and concepts. Abbreviate these terms to save time.
- Pay attention to your understanding of the material while in lecture. Include questions and comments in your notes.

Use other resources and assistive technology:

- Record lectures. You may qualify for a digital recorder through the ASIP program.
- Make an appointment with an ASIP instructor for advice and guided practice.