Note Taking Strategies

College Lectures

The college lecture is usually a new experience to students. Unlike most high school classes, college lectures can be very large. In high school the function of a lecture is usually to rehash material already covered in the textbook. College lectures most often provide an extension or enhancement of text material or introduce entirely new material.

Lectures provide rich learning opportunities that can help you in a number of ways:

- By reinforcing key concepts and principles
- Demonstrating application of concepts
- Providing different perspectives of text material
- Expanding on course topics not covered

Lecture notes can also give you an opportunity to take notes that will help you with later study and review. To get the most out of lecture time, you need to make the most out of listening, seeing, thinking and problem solving abilities.

Note Taking Strategies

Before The Lecture

Review. Look over the course syllabus and notes from previous class helps you determine the intended focus of the lecture and gives you some background information for learning new material.

Read the assigned material. Doing so will help you better understand the material discussed in class. You’ll already be familiar with the concepts and vocabulary that are used.

During The Lecture

Avoid distraction. If you find yourself daydreaming out of windows, for instance, don’t sit next to one.

Date your notes. It will be easier to find notes for any particular class when you review later.

Take Spacious Notes. Use one side of the page only. This allows you more freedom for including additional notes, for inserting textbook references and for reorganizing information later. Leave blank spaces for material you miss or that you are uncertain about, ask a classmate or the professor to help you.

Use your own words. Translate concepts presented in class into your own words.

Be sensitive to the lecturer’s verbal and visual cues. Phrases such as “in conclusion” signal summary topics of primary importance. Tone and pauses can also alert you to important information.

Mark examples in your textbook. Examples, pictures, graphs, problems, etc. presented in the lecture help illustrate important concepts.
Use abbreviations and symbols. This can greatly speed your note taking and thereby increase the number of notes you take during class.

Recognize a lecturer’s pattern and follow it. Knowing your instructor’s lecture technique will alert you to times you should be paying extra attention.

Pay attention to other’s questions. Important concepts are often clarified at these times.

After The Lecture Ends

Review lecture notes periodically. Reviewing periodically keeps information fresh in your long-term memory and helps you integrate new information with old information.

Re-organize your notes. Categorize and re-classify the information, cluster similar concepts together, look for the overriding concepts behind sample problems, compare and contrast theories, etc.

Synthesize. Look for relationships among material presented in the lecture, in discussion sessions, in homework labs and in the text.