

# Taking Lecture Notes

## Before the lecture

Taking good lecture notes starts before you even get to class.

- ✓ Read the text to become familiar with the material. The syllabus generally indicates what will be covered in class; you are meant to read the material *before class* so you can follow along with what is said in lecture, and you can ask questions if you didn't understand something in the text.
- ✓ If your time is limited, at least read the chapter introduction and summary.
- ✓ Review old notes to refresh your memory of what's already been covered
- ✓ Review past week's notes right before lecture so you can ask questions about information you didn't understand

## During the lecture

The biggest challenge in a large lecture class is to keep your attention focused on the instructor. It is easy to lose concentration, so you need to improve your listening skills. Do not give in to distractions, such as daydreaming or looking at other students. Each professor is different and has her/his own lecture style. Listen for clues that will tell you what is important.

- Sit in front so you can see and hear better. The less that is between you and the instructor, the easier it is to keep your attention focused on the lecture.
  - Use a loose leaf binder so you can add notes and handouts.
  - Date and number pages so you can easily refer to your notes later.
  - Design your own system of abbreviations.
  - Take notes on one side of the page and on one side of the paper. Leave a 2-3" margin so you can annotate major ideas or mark questions. Leave space to fill in information and skip a line or two to indicate where one key idea ends and another begins.
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- ✓ Take special note of anything presented visually (for example, power point slides, writing on the board, or handouts)
  - ✓ Listen for superlatives, such as *the most important theory...*, *the greatest contribution...*, *the best example...*)
  - ✓ Don't be afraid to ask questions about the material! If you don't understand something, it is likely that other students also are unsure of the information. For example: *you called Kennedy's agreement with the steel industry a "non-inflationary wage agreement" - what is that?* Make sure your questions are constructive; it is usually not appropriate to ask questions such as: *is this going to be on the test?* or *is this information important?*
  - ✓ Write down lists. For example, if your instructor says: *"The Kennedy administration planned to stimulate the economy in five ways..."* and goes on to discuss this, you should be able to pick out the five ways.
  - ✓ Be aware of inductive and deductive lecture styles. Inductive lecturers state the topic upfront then list subcategories (*there are three general systems of stratification... 1..., 2..., 3...*); deductive lecturers state the reasons/ideas/ theories/etc. then summarize to give you the topic (*1..., 2..., 3..., ...so there you have the three systems of stratification*).
  - ✓ Make a special note of anything the instructor repeats or refers to several times.

- ✓ Listen for changes in volume or speech rates. Usually this indicates the instructor feels strongly about that particular material, or he/she is pausing to give students time to take down some notes on the information.

**Example:**

*Three problems were waiting for JFK the day he walked into the Oval Office. The Southern Democrats, who had gained new voice in Congress in recent years, didn't like his domestic policies. In addition, inflation was skyrocketing. Kennedy tried to keep inflation under control by negotiating a non-inflationary wage agreement with the steel industry. He also supported a tax cut bill to stimulate the economy. Finally, the space program was a problem. Kennedy thought it could be used to stimulate the economy by creating jobs and for military purposes as the Cold War began to heat up. There was a school of thought, however, that remembered the attempts at U.S. space travel and declared the program a waste of money.*

	3 probs for JFK when elected: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Southern dem's didn't like his domestic policies</li> <li>2. incr'ing inflation</li> <li>3. space program -- waste of \$?</li> </ol>
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**After the lecture**

- ✓ Organize and reduce your notes. Use the margin to annotate notes as soon after lecture as possible. Reduce material to key words and phrases, and try to predict test questions.
- ✓ Rehearse the material to help you remember it. Copy the information again or discuss it with someone from class.
- ✓ Add textbook notes to your lecture notes, so you have all your materials in one place and can look for common themes.
- ✓ Reflect on what you've written. Think about your notes as you re-read them and ask yourself if you truly understand everything. If not, ask someone from class, visit your instructor, or refer to the text to see if there was something you missed.
- ✓ Review your notes daily. If you have annotated your lecture and text notes, it doesn't take long to review. If you keep up with the material, you don't have to "cram" for exams.

**Example:**

what is non-inflat. wage agree?  JFK's 3 probs = S. dem's, inflation, space program	3 probs for JFK when elected: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Southern demo's didn't like his domestic policies</li> <li>2. incr'ing inflation</li> <li>3. space program -- waste of \$?</li> </ol> **add in notes from text
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