

Counselling &  
Learning Support  
North Vancouver Campus

Student Success  
Workshops

# Lecture Note-Taking



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# Lecture Note-Taking

## Introduction

Taking good lecture notes is a difficult but essential skill as your notes act, first and foremost as a written record of lecture material that you will study from later. The act of note-taking itself helps to keep you focused on the lecture and starts to put information into memory. While many people think of note-taking as something you do during a lecture, effective note-taking is in fact a three part process. These three parts include:

1. Preparing to take notes
2. Taking concise, organized notes during the lecture
3. Reviewing the notes after class

Each phase of the note-taking process is discussed below:

## Preparing to Take Notes

There are several useful things you can do *before* class that will make taking notes in-class easier:

- Look at your course-outline to see what the topic of the lecture will be and start anticipating what might be discussed in class.
- Quickly read over your notes from the previous class to refresh your memory and get mentally warmed-up for the new material to come.
- If your lecture is based on textbook material, read your assigned chapter before class. This will introduce you to ideas and concepts that you will be learning about in class.
- Get to class early so that you can sit front and centre. This position enables you to engage with the instructor and ask questions more easily.

## Taking Concise, Organized Notes in Class

Listening and taking effective notes takes practice and will get easier as the semester progresses. Every instructor has a different lecturing style and it may take a couple of weeks into the term to adjust to each instructor and find a style of note-taking that will be effective for each particular course. Courses that are heavily based on the textbook may require you to focus on the main ideas in-class while filling in the details afterwards from your text. Courses that deliver separate material in-class to the text may require you to take detailed notes in-class as you cannot use your text as a reference. Whatever the situation, here are some tips for taking effective notes during class.

## a) Recording Strategies

- Always date and number the pages of your notes in case they get out of order.
- Give each set of notes a title based on the topic being discussed. You can usually add the title to your notes before the class starts by looking at your course outline.
- Listen for the main ideas and topics covered the lecture and make sure you get these down in the form of headings.
- Record the related supporting details in point form underneath the heading. If supporting details are not related to the main headings, your notes will be difficult to understand and study from later.
- Watch for the clues teachers often use for emphasizing main points. These include:
  - writing material on the board,
  - repetition – the same ideas is presented several times,
  - emphasis – this can be judged by tone of voice and gesture and/or the amount of time a teacher spends on the topic,
  - word signals; e.g., “It is important to note that...”,
  - the use of ordinals: e.g., “First, next, also, in addition, finally, etc.”, and
  - introductions and /or summaries given at the start or end of class.
- Do not try to write everything down, as you will get left behind. Instead, try to paraphrase the speaker by summarizing and rewording the information into a reduced form.
- Leave gaps in your notes when moving from one idea or topic to the next. This makes it easier to see where an idea ends and another one starts.
- If you do miss information, leave a gap in your notes, catch up with the speaker, and fill in the missing information later by asking a friend, checking your textbook or approaching the teacher.
- Speed up your note-taking by using abbreviations and by writing in point form rather than in full sentences. See overleaf for examples of the different types of abbreviations students can use:
- Choose a recording method for your note-taking that suits the style of the lecture and meets your needs as a learner. See the section in this handout on **Note-Taking Methods**.

## b) Abbreviations

<b>USE SYMBOLS TO REPLACE WORDS</b>			
&	and	@	at
+, -	plus, minus	. .	therefore
=	equal	w/	with
#	number	w/o	without
↑↓	increase, decrease	e.g.	for example
→	leads to	vs.	versus
<	less than	%	percent
>	greater than		

<b>USE SHORT ABBREVIATIONS FOR COMMON TERMS OR WORDS</b>	
definition = def.	department = dept.
formula = fmla.	maximum = max.
function = fct.	solutions = sol.
exercise = exc.	

<b>USE JUST ENOUGH OF A WORD TO MAKE IT RECOGNIZABLE</b>	
behaviour = behav.	organization = org.
important = import.	evidence = evid.
question = quest.	homework = hmwk.
association = assoc.	government = gov't.

## c) Note-taking Methods

- **The Outline Format**

This note-taking method involves a system of indenting information to show the relationship between main ideas, major supporting points and minor supporting details. This requires listening for different levels of information and works well for lectures that present ideas in a fairly organized, linear fashion. Labels that represent the levels of information can be added during the lecture or can be added afterwards as part of your editing process. See the example below.

### **Example:**

#### **PROCRASTINATION**

##### **A. The Reasons People Procrastinate**

###### **1. Fear of Failure**

- **Afraid they won't be successful.**
- **They put off the work.**
- **Blame the lack of studying for doing poorly rather than blaming themselves.**

###### **2. Perfectionism**

- **Have high standards.**
- **Want work to be perfect.**
- **May choose not to hand in work rather than risk getting a low grade.**

###### **3. Avoidance of Control**

- **Do not want to be told what to do.**
- **Form of rebellion.**

##### **B. Symptoms of Procrastination**

● **The Two Column Method**

The two column method involves dividing your note-taking paper into two columns and using each column for recording specific types of information. For example, in a math class, you might put a sample problem in the left-hand column and the steps to solving the problem in the right-hand column. In a History class, you might have the key dates or time periods being discussed in one column and the related significant events in the other. Another situation in which you can use two column notes is when adding additional notes to power point slides. When printing the slides, select three slides per page and then, during the lecture, take your extra notes on the lines given besides the slides. See below for an example.

*Take additional notes on this side*



**What is Metacognition?**

“Knowledge about your learning”

Metacognition involves understanding:

- **How** you process and learn information
- **What** you need to learn
- **Which** strategies would be most effective for the learning task

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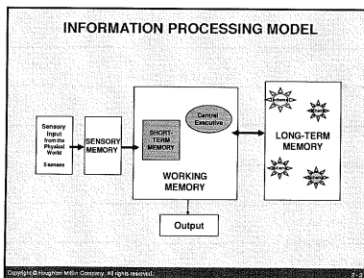
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**Sensory Input**

Information enters the brain via the five senses:

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## • The Cornell Method

The Cornell method is a special form of two column method of note-taking that is especially effective for classes where you are being extensively tested on your lecture notes. This system involves setting up your note-taking paper so you have a 2.5 inch margin on the left and a 6 inch margin on the right. **During** the lecture, only take notes on the right, leaving the margin blank. **After** the lecture, review your notes, create questions that your notes answer, and then write these questions in the margin adjacent to the relevant notes. Then, come exam time, cover the notes on the right and use the questions on the left to test yourself on the material. See the example below.

	1.	Sept 4, 07
	<u>The Three Memory Process</u>	
What does memory depend on?	Memory depends on:	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encoding</li> <li>2. Storage</li> <li>3. Retrieval</li> </ol>	
What is encoding?	1. <u>Encoding</u>	
Explain the 4 types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- info comes into mem.</li> <li>- brain creates mem. codes               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Acoustic codes = sounds</li> <li>ii. Visual codes = sights</li> <li>iii. Motor Codes = actions</li> <li>iv. Semantic codes = feelings &amp; experiences</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	
What is storage?	2. <u>Storage</u>	
What 3 ways can memories be stored? Give an example of each.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- retention of info. over time</li> <li>- info. stored in three ways.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Episodic memories = memories of significant events                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ex. trip to Disneyland</li> </ul> </li> <li>b) Semantic memories = memories of people or things that had an emotional impact.                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ex. a teacher you really liked or</li> </ul> </li> <li>c) Procedural memories = memories of how to perform certain tasks                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ex. riding a bike</li> </ul> </li> </ol> </li> </ul>	
What is retrieval?	3. <u>Retrieval</u>	
Describe the two types.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- info stored in memory is brought into conscious.</li> <li>- two types of retrieval:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Recall = retrieve info without any help</li> <li>b. Recognition = info is retrieved by clues</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	
Which is easier?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- recog. is easier than recall.</li> </ul>	

## Review Your Notes after Class

The last phase in the note-taking process involves working with and reviewing your notes as soon after the lecture as possible as well as reviewing your notes periodically throughout the term. It is the review process that helps you to better understand and remember the lecture material throughout the term so you are not scrambling before exams. Some of the things you can do when reviewing your notes include:

- Editing your notes. Edit your notes as soon after class as possible by highlighting main ideas and key points for emphasis, adding any missing information, and/or rewriting points for clarification. Always ask yourself “will these notes make sense to me in several weeks time when the material is no longer fresh in my memory?”
- Writing a summary of the main ideas from the lecture. This can be done as a summary paragraph, a list of main points, a chart, or as a concept map.
- Reciting out loud the information in your notes. This give you chance to put the information in your own words and use your auditory memory to process the ideas.
- Creating cue cards with key terms on one side and their definitions on the other.
- Make-up a self-test and quiz yourself on your notes or use the Cornell method as described above.

## Conclusion

Becoming a good note-taker is not easy and requires practice and persistence. If you have a class that is particularly challenging, try creating a study group where you go over the material together and/or share lecture notes. Another possibility is to tape record the lecture so you can listen to it again and flush out your notes. Be warned that this takes a considerable amount of time and that you should get the permission of the instructor before you tape record a lecture.

**For more information or help with lecture note-taking, please make an appointment with the Learning Specialist at the North Vancouver campus by calling 604.984.1744.**