

# Improve Your Listening and Note Taking Skills

## *Listening and Note Taking*

1. **Prepare to listen.** Your enjoyment and understanding of an activity often depend on your background knowledge. Out-of-class preparation readies you for learning. Effective in-class performance maximizes your listening and note taking processes.

### Out of class preparation:

- › complete assignments
- › review for next lecture's content
- › read chapter
- › construct a chapter map
- › review last lecture's content

### In-class performance:

- › take course materials to class
- › arrive on time
- › sit near the front of the class
- › have/get/create a purpose for listening

2. **Develop a Note Taking system.** No matter what system you use (see below), a system enables you to organize ideas effectively and efficiently. You may find that some systems work better for some types of courses than others. Experiment with different systems until you find the one(s) you want.

- › Running paragraph
- › Formal outline
- › Modified outline
- › Map
- › Cornell

3. **Identify the lecture's essence.** A lecture is a bit like a jigsaw puzzles. Your professor gives you a piece of the puzzle at a time. Your role is to determine the overall picture or main idea of the lecture. You should, then, always ask yourself, "What point is the professor making? How do these ideas fit together?"
4. **Communicate with your instructor.** Many students think of a lecture as one-way communication: your instructor provides information and you receive it. However, professors gather much information from body language (yawns, newspaper reading, sleeping, tapping vs. appreciative nodding, eye contact, alert posture). In addition, the questions you ask in class, as well as the comments you make during out-of-class appointments are ways to communicate your needs with your instructor and clarify your understanding.
5. **Avoid distractions in yourself/others.** Your ability to listen and take notes erodes if you can't concentrate. Many distractions result from your ability to listen faster than the speaker can speak. As a result, your mind looks for other things to occupy or entertain itself. Internal distractions result from mind games in which you mentally

think about other topics (e.g., things you need to do after class, personal concerns, or critique a speaker's delivery, negative self-talk). External distractions occur most often when you consciously or unconsciously put yourself in situations that sabotage your ability to concentrate. For example, if you sit by a window, you may find the views outside the window to be more interesting than the topic of the lecture. If you sit at the back of the class, you will be distracted by everything that happens between you and the lecturer.

**6. Take notes.** Research indicates that information recorded in notes is remembered on tests more frequently than information left to auditory memory. The following suggestions help you take effective notes.

- ▶ Date each day's notes
- ▶ Use a consistent format
- ▶ Dvlp (develop) a key for symbols & abbreviations
- ▶ Group and label info (information) to aid recall
- ▶ Record what is written on the board
- ▶ Use white space
- ▶ Write legibly on only the front side of the page
- ▶ Condense--shorthand, not dictation
- ▶ Write down specific page #'s to which the instructor refers
- ▶ Use binder paper instead of a spiral notebook
- ▶ Don't doodle or cram space
- ▶ Keep other class notes separate
- ▶ Keep your own thoughts separate
- ▶ Don't fall asleep

**7. Review.** If you ever took great notes only to find they didn't make sense a month later, you were a victim of the curve of forgetting. According to the curve, you forget about half of what you hear within an hour of hearing it. You forget about 80% of the information within a month. Reviewing notes helps you keep ideas in memory through repetition. Reviewing as soon as possible after class or at least within 24 hours gives you an opportunity to fill any gaps in your notes before you forget what the notes were about!

**8. Transform raw notes into a finished product.** Your notes are raw materials, not a finished product. Rewriting helps you integrate text or other materials into lecture content. The Cornell note taking systems provides a recall column that helps you summarize main ideas. Mapping or charting also helps you synthesize information.

**9. Take responsibility for your success.** No matter what note taking system you use, how effectively your professors deliver course content, or the way in which you listen in class, you remain responsible for the learning you acquire. Whatever it takes--tutoring, extra study, appointments with faculty, and so on--only you profit from your learning. The success you achieve is up to you.

