

## 2.14 Listening and notetaking skills

### Listening and notetaking skills

Lectures are a main form of teaching in higher education establishments. More often than not they are one-way communication exercises - the lecturer speaks and the student listens, but some lecturers do build in a time slot for questions.

The quality of lectures can vary considerably. Some lecturers are good at communicating their subject and others not so good; some lecturers may provide detailed notes and others may not; but despite these factors, it is up to you, the student, to learn what you can from the situation. The following are a few guidelines that, if followed, should help you to get the most out of the lectures you attend.

### Preparation

Consider some of these questions before you go to a lecture:

- What is the topic of the lecture?
- What do I already know that will help me understand this topic?
- How does the topic relate to other parts of the course?
- Have I done any recommended preparatory work for this topic?
- Have I formulated any questions for this topic?
- Have I arranged to compare notes with another student afterwards?

Spending a short time in preparation creates a receptive frame of mind so that you are ready to link any new knowledge from the lecture to your store of existing knowledge. This will, in turn, help to develop your understanding.

### Listening Skills

Listening should be active. This means that you need to ask yourself questions about what is being said. Consider the following:

- What is she/he saying?
- What does it mean?
- Where is it leading?
- What are the main ideas?
- What is the supporting evidence?
- Is she/he answering my questions about the topic?
- How can I use this information?

### Taking Notes

There is no right or wrong way of taking notes from lectures. To a certain extent, you need to experiment and adopt the approach you feel most comfortable with. Don't feel that you have to record every word the lecturer says. This not only puts you

under a lot of pressure, but it is an impossible task that will leave you missing great chunks of what has been said. Consider the following guidelines:

- Listen for the main points and record these together with any supporting evidence
- Listen for cues from the lecturer such as, "The main point is... There are two issues involved " etcs
- Leave room in your notes to add things later
- Review your notes as soon as possible after the lecture
- Discuss with other students

Your ability to take clear, concise notes will greatly improve with practice.

*(adapted from: [www.bradford.ac.uk/acad/civeng/skills/lectures.htm#listen](http://www.bradford.ac.uk/acad/civeng/skills/lectures.htm#listen))*

***There are several good reasons for organizing and reviewing your notes as soon as possible after the lecture.***

A. While the lecture is still fresh in your mind, you can fill in from memory examples and facts which you did not have time to write down during the lecture. More over, you can recall what parts of the lecture were unclear to you so that you can consult the lecturer, the graduate assistant, a classmate, your text, or additional readings for further information.

B. Immediately review results in better retention than review after a longer period of time. Unless a student reviews within 24 hours after the lecture or at least before the next lecture, his retention will drop; and he will be relearning rather than reviewing.

***A method of annotation is usually preferable to recopying notes. The following suggestions for annotating may be helpful:***

A. Underline key statements or important concepts.

B. Use asterisks or other signal marks to indicate importance.

C. Use margins or blank pages for coordinating notes with the text. Perhaps indicate relevant pages of the text beside the corresponding information in the notes.

D. Use a key and a summary:

Use one of the margins to keep a key to important names, formulas, dates, concepts, and the like. This forces you to anticipate questions of an objective nature and provides specific facts that you need to develop essays.

Use the other margin to write a short summary of the topics on the page, relating the contents of the page to the whole lecture or to the lecture of the day before.

Condensing the notes in this way not only helps you to learn them but also prepares you for the kind of thinking required on essay exams and many so-called "objective" exams.

*(adapted from: [www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/editing.html](http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/editing.html))*

**TRY** being a positive, active listener.

**HOW?** Sit down front and do not read or talk. Pay particular attention during the second 20 minutes (when you tend to lose it) and to the last minutes when a summary might be given or conclusions drawn.

**TRY** being a positive, active learner.

**HOW?** Come to class with an interest in the material and with questions to be answered. You can develop these by thinking about and anticipating the lecture and by pre-reading the text (This latter is especially helpful if you find yourself having difficulty keeping up with the material.)

**TRY** getting accurate notes, with special attention to the main ideas.

**WHY?** There may be an overhead; if so, get that material down. In addition, look for points of emphasis-- from the lecturer's verbal language, body language, or careful reading of his/her notes. If you still feel you're missing the main points, try showing your notes to a classmate or to the lecturer.

**TRY** leaving lots of space between ideas.

**WHY?** Because you want lots of room to continue to add notes in your own words; this will help you learn the material on a deeper level by integrating it with what you already know. Also, the extra space will make it easier for you to find material when you are studying.

**TRY** going over new notes--10 minutes for each class--within 24 hours.

**WHY?** Because you lose 50 - 80% of the material if you don't.

**TRY** setting your notes up so you can study effectively from them.

**HOW?** Leave wide left margins; here you will write questions from which to study your notes. Leave the back of the page blank, so you can fold the page, cover the notes, and answer the questions when studying.

*(adapted from: [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocs/Study/listening.html](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocs/Study/listening.html))*