Getting the Most Out of Lectures

Lectures present unique challenges since you can’t control the pace like you can with reading or studying. To get the most of our lectures, consider the following tips.

### Before class

**Complete the assigned readings.** This will give you a bit of background, increasing your likelihood to catch (and understand) the main points. Plus, the framework will let you better organize your notes and give you the chance to think of questions before the lecture.

**Boost your alertness and attentiveness.** Make sure you’re prioritizing sleep and able to focus during class. Sit up close, close your browser, or take notes by hand to lessen the distractions.

**Quickly review.** Take 5-10 minutes to look over your notes from the previous class. This, along with the readings, will help give you a foundation for the new material you’re about to learn.

### During class

**Use outlines to get organized.** Some professors will begin the class with an outline (for example, the first slide may list the goals for the day), or the professor may share the slides with you ahead of time. These outlines will help you organize the notes and give you a good idea of the main points.

**Take good notes, capturing the main points of the lecture in an organized way.**

- Learn to actively listen and watch for clues that indicate what is important. A few examples of the types of comments to look out for include:
  - The important point it... The take-away message is... the key to understanding X is... don’t forget that... pay special attention to...
  - The three steps are... two effects of Y are... the top characteristics are...
  - Remember... to repeat... as I’ve said...

- When a professor writes something on the board, it’s a good idea to write it down as well. You can decide later if it pertains to a main point, supporting detail, or was perhaps part of a tangent.

- If a lecture is poorly organized, or when your professor moves from one topic to the next, focus first on capturing the main ideas and re-organize your notes later. If taking notes by hand, leave a few blank lines to indicate the change of focus.

**Participate.** Asking questions and volunteering keeps you attentive and engaged.

### After class

**Review your notes.** Take 5-10 minutes after class to review what you’ve recorded. Add any important information that you remember but didn’t write down. If you didn’t understand something, look it up, ask a classmate, or attend office hours.

**Quiz yourself.** Ask questions that force you to understand the material in your notes. Questions that begin with “explain how” or ask “what is the connection between X and Y” or “how do you solve a _____ problem” will help you understand the main points and the relationships between lecture topics.

### Other resources:
See handouts on [Note-taking](#) and [Getting the Most out of Office Hours](#).

### Works consulted