Writing Center

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December 18, 2006

Notetaking from Lectures and Reading

Notetaking Format

1. Before the presentation begins, record the date, the place, and the presenter. Number pages as you work.
2. Use dark ink and write on one side of the page for easier reading and reviewing later.
3. Use a double-entry notetaking system that leaves space for your comments and questions.
4. Write only on one side of page.
5. Develop a shorthand system, for example, content-specific abbreviations. In a physics or chemistry class, use the periodic elements (write Fe instead of Iron). In a literature class, write onom instead of onomatopoeia. Write ex to mean example, an = sign to mean equals, @ for at. Use figures instead of numbers. But be sure to pick abbreviations and symbols that you'll remember.
6. Show important items with special markings: add * or draw a circle or box around information you know is critical. If you are uncertain about something write a question mark in a circle.

Suggestions for Listening

1. Sit as close as possible to the speaker. You can improve your listening skills by sitting close, avoiding distractions, and focusing attention on the speaker.
2. Resist the temptation to read or write on other matters than the lecture content during the lecture. Doodle if you must , but do not write letters or do homework for other classes.
3. If you are able to write down everything, do so. If not, be selective.
   a. Definitely copy everything that is written on the board or presented on a screen or other display format.
   b. Write any information that is repeated or accompanied by emphasis clues such as "most important" or "another cause."
   c. Write all number or listed items.
   d. Write all terms and their definitions.
   e. If you cannot keep up with the speaker, jot down key nouns and verbs so that you can return to them later and ask questions. Some speakers allow the audience to interrupt with relevant questions and with requests to repeat a key point.
   f. If other people make points with which the speaker indicates agreement, write those points down and note that they came from the audience.
4. Tape record the lecture only if you have advance permission from the speaker and are unable to keep up with written notes. Most listeners benefits from written notes, even when they are recording the presentation.

Structure of a Traditional Lecture

You can improve your listening skills if you can anticipate the order of information. These items are typical of formal lectures and classroom presentations.

1. Opening. Professional speakers sometimes speak informally at first to give the audience a chance to prepare for the main points. Teachers sometimes review previous material or call roll or ask for question.
2. Main point or thesis. Experienced speakers let the audience know early what their key point or purpose is. In a classroom, teachers may even give a brief overview of the information to be covered during the class. Listen for the main point of points.
3. Body. Here is the information that explains, illustrates, supports, and clarifies the main points. Listen for definitions of terms and concepts as well as lists, examples, and reasons.

4. Summary. Many speakers summarize their key points at the end of a presentation. Pay careful attention the last five minutes of a class. Some professors speak quickly here when they realize they are almost out of time. If you have questions that have not been answered, write them down to ask later.
5. Question-and-answer or discussion period. Some speakers set aside time for questions and general discussion. If you have written down questions or comments during the lecture, you can participate now.

Taking Notes on Reading Assignments

Many of the suggestions for taking notes on lectures apply equally to reading notes. However, some additional aids takes advantage of the visual clues and typical structure of textbooks, informational essays, and persuasive essays.

1. Scan the material quickly to get a sense of general content and the organization. Pay attention to typical points of emphasis and information.
   a. Titles and subtitles
   b. headings and other elements in larger or darker (bold face) or slanted (italicized) type
   c. Items in lists with numbers or bullets ()
   d. Items and captions in charts or illustrations
   e. Items in contents and glossaries
2. Read carefully, writing down the main and secondary points, preferably in an outline format. A double-entry system using one side of the page and double spacing to allow for later additions and corrections is helpful.
3. Recognize typical essay structure and write down these key elements from the reading material:
   a. Introduction with thesis that identifies the main overall point and purpose
   b. Beginning and endings of chapters, which often contain summaries of the key points
   c. Beginning and endings of paragraphs, which usually contain a clear topic sentence that identifies the main point of the paragraph.

4 Review your notes when you are finished to see whether you feel they are complete. Use this review to highlight significant points and to jot down questions you need to ask the teacher or another student.

Using your Notes Effectively

1. Soon after the presentation or reading, review you notes and fill in as many gaps as possible from memory. Review previous lecture and reading notes regularly.
2. If you need additional information or help, call or visit the professor during scheduled office hours
3. Form a study group with one or more students. Compare notes. You can fill gaps in each other's notes and may be able to answer each other's questions.
4. As you review your notes, write down all your questions, concerns, and comments. If you have used a double -entry notetaking system, you have a place available for writing these items.
5. Outline your notes as your review them so that you can recognize or create a structure.
6. Paraphrase key elements—write them in your own words to help you understand and remember them .
7. If you are transcribing a recorded lecture, take time to review the transcription.
8. As you review and outline, look for similarities, differences, causes, effects, and other relationships that might be presented as discussion questions on tests or as topics for papers.