

# A Guide To Making Notes From Lectures

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Many students do not take notes during lectures, in the mistaken belief that everything they need to know for exams is on the professor's handouts (e.g., Powerpoint slides). As a result, these students don't do as well on course assignments and examinations as they could. That's because professors use their lectures to provide important information not covered by handouts, and also to relate the content of individual lectures to the wider objectives and principles of the course.

Take lecture notes with a view to ideas, not just facts. The following suggestions will help you to

- develop your critical thinking skills,
- write better assignments, and
- write better exams.

## Record:

Know the course outline and take notes on what is important according to the course framework.

- Your aim is to map the main topics and examples discussed, not to transcribe everything.
- Use spacing and visual layout to show the groupings of ideas.
- Be sure to leave wide left and bottom margins on each page for further comments of your own.

You can also look for signals from the lecturer—verbal and non-verbal—to tell you what's important. For example, professors show emphasis through their body language and pauses in speaking. Verbal cues include transitions ("I'd like to turn now to... ") and breakdowns ("There are three main issues involved here...").

## Reduce:

Soon after the lecture, reread your notes for sense and accuracy. Make sure everything is accurate and complete. (If you have made your notes on computer, now is the time to print them out. Remember to leave wide left and bottom margins on each page.) Now pick out key words and write them in the left margin.

## Recite:

Cover your notes and use the key words in the margins as cues to recall everything you can about the topic.

STATE THE IDEAS AS MUCH AS YOU CAN IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

## Reflect:

Write your reflections about the topic on the lower part of the page. Also write down any questions your notes raise for you. Relate your notes to other points in previous lectures or readings and to your upcoming essay topics. Include your own thinking

- on the subject,
- on your experiences as a new member of your profession,
- on ways in which you agree or disagree with the professor's ideas.

## Review:

Before an exam, recite repeatedly, again covering notes and using marginal key words as cues. Think again about how the notes relate to the overall framework of the course: Exam questions will always be framed in such a way as to get you to apply specific facts and ideas to the larger ideas of the course.