A System for Effective Listening and Note-Taking

You can think about 4 TIMES FASTER than a lecturer can speak. Effective LISTENING requires the expenditure of energy; to compensate for the rate of presentation, you have to actively intend to listen. NOTE-TAKING is one way to enhance listening, and using a systematic approach to the taking and reviewing of your notes can add immeasurably to your understanding and remembering the content of lectures.

BEFORE CLASS
• Develop a mind-set geared toward listening.
• Test yourself over the previous lecture while waiting for the next one to begin.
• Skim relevant reading assignments to acquaint yourself with main ideas, new technical terms, etc.
• Enhance your physical and mental alertness: eat a snack before class, sit in the front and/or center of the room, focus your attention on the speaker.
• Choose notebooks that will enhance your systematic note-taking: a separate notebook with full-sized pages is recommended for each course. You might wish to mark off the pages into one of the formats shown on the lower part of this page.
• INTEND TO LISTEN.

DURING CLASS
• Listen for the structure and information in the lecture.
• Resist distractions, emotional reactions or boredom.
• Pay attention to the speaker for verbal, postural, and visual clues to what's important.
• Label important points and organizational clues: main points, examples.
• If your lecturer has an accent you find hard to understand or has mannerisms you find distracting, relax and attend even more carefully to the content of the lecture.
• When possible, translate the lecture into your own words, but if you can't, don't let it worry you into inattention!
• Be consistent in your use of form, abbreviation, etc.
• If you feel you don't take enough notes, divide your page into 5 sections and try to fill each part every 10 minutes (or work out your own formula).
• Ask questions if you don’t understand.
• Instead of closing your notebook early and getting ready to leave, listen carefully to information given toward the end of class; summary statements may be of particular value in highlighting main points; there may be possible quiz questions, etc.

AFTER CLASS
• Clear up any questions raised by the lecture by asking either the teacher or classmates.
• Fill in missing points or misunderstood terms from text or other sources.
• Edit your notes, labeling main points, adding recall clues and questions to be answered. Key points in the notes can be highlighted with different colors of ink.
• Make note of your ideas and reflections, keeping them separate from those of the speaker.

PERIODICALLY
• Review your notes: glance at your recall clues and see how much you can remember before rereading the notes.
• Look for the emergence of themes, main concepts, and methods of presentation over the course of several lectures.
• Make up and answer possible test questions.

From Pauk, Walter, “How to Study in College”
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