Effective Note-Taking

Note-taking is essential for (1) lectures which are a highly condensed method of passing on information and (2) for reading because what you don't write down, you can't remember. Note-taking is a skill that can be learned. It takes an understanding of what you're doing and practice which involves effort.

**Purposes for Note-Taking:**
- Provides a written record for review.
- Provides a definite, limited learning task.
- Forces the listener to pay attention.
- Requires organization which involves active effort on the part of the listener.
- Requires condensing and rephrasing which aids understanding.

**Physical Factors:** Sit near the front and center where vision and hearing is better, and avoid distractions such as doorways, windows, etc.

**Materials:** Use a loose-leaved notebook for easier use, for organization, and additions. Use ink pens; ink is easier to read. Have two ink pens on hand. You might need a back-up. Contrasting colors can also be used for added emphasis and distinguishing important points.

**Before Going to Class:**
- Review your notes and other background material.
- Review your reading assignment. Reading should be done *before* class.
- Think through what has happened in the class to date.
- Be prepared to understand and remember.
- Anticipate what is to come and evaluate how well you will be able to do this.

**Practice the TQLR Technique:**
- **Tune-in:** Listening takes energy. Look at the speaker. His/her expressions and mannerisms will give extra clues. (Don't let the personality or mannerisms of a speaker put you off.) Looking helps focus.
- **Question:** Nothing will generate interest so much as an appropriate question.
- **Listen:** Be selective. Some things are more important than others. Be alert for speaker emphasis through tone and gesture, repetition, use of cue words such as *remember, most important, etc.*, illustration on the board, and reference to text. Note especially those ideas which conflict with your own picture of the world: "odd" ideas are difficult to understand initially and require extra effort: you tend to remember things which support your existing concepts and forget those which disagree.
- **Review:** Glance back over material from time to time to see if a pattern is emerging, if consistency is being maintained, etc. If possible, clarify points during or after the lecture: give the speaker a reasonable chance to make his/her point clear. Avoid sidetracking the speaker.

**While Taking Notes:**
- Don't try for a verbatim transcript: get all of the main ideas; record some details, illustrations, implications, etc.
- Paraphrase, but remember that the speaker may serve as a model.
Integrate with other knowledge you already have, but don't allow preconceived notions to distort what you are hearing.

Use form to indicate relative importance of items: underscore or star major points.

Leave plenty of white space for later additions.

Note the speaker's organization of material: organization aids memory and indicates gaps when they occur.

Be accurate:
   1. Listen carefully to what is being said.
   2. Pay attention to qualifying words such as sometimes, usually, rarely, etc.
   3. Notice signals that a change of direction is coming: but, however, on the other hand.

Be an aggressive listener:
   1. Ask questions and discuss if it's permitted. If not, jot questions in your notes.
   2. Seek meanings. Look for implications beyond what is being said.
   3. Relate the material to your other classes and your life outside of school.

Develop a suitable system of mechanics:
   1. Jot down words or phrases, not entire sentences.
   2. Develop some system of shorthand and be consistent in its use:
      - Hrs a sntnc wth vwls lft t.
      - Leave out small service words.
      - Use contractions and abbreviations.
      - Use symbols: +, =, &, @, etc.
   3. Try to listen and write at the same time. It can be done. You may practice listening to the news on TV and taking notes.

After Taking Notes:
   1. Review and rework them as soon after class as possible. (You should consider this in scheduling your classes.)
   2. Don't just recopy or type without thought: rewrite incomplete or skimpy parts in greater detail; fill-in gaps you remember and points heard but not recorded.
   3. Arrange with another student to compare notes.
   4. Find answers to any questions remaining unanswered.
   5. Write a brief summary of the class session.
   6. Formulate several generalized test questions based on the material.
   7. Review at spaced intervals. Relearning is rapid if regular review is used.
   8. Compare the information in your notes with your own experience:
      1. Don't accept everything uncritically.
      2. Don't reject what seems strange or incorrect. Check it out. Be willing to hold some seeming inconsistencies in your mind over a period of time.
      3. Make meaningful associations.
   9. Memorize what must be memorized.
   10. Sharpen your note-taking technique by looking at other student's notes.
   11. Practice skills you wish to develop.

Source: De Anza College