LECTURE: “HOW SPEAKERS SHOW WHAT IS IMPORTANT”

When you listen to an academic lecture and take notes, you must always try to discover and write down the instructor’s main ideas. The main ideas of a lecture are the points the instructor emphasizes and explains in detail. The lecture then develops or supports these main ideas with details, explanations, examples or definitions. Although it is true that some college instructors are better at lecturing than others and more successful at making their main ideas stand out, most instructors give many clues to help their students figure out what is important in their lectures. Today, I’d like to point out several ways that American college instructors show what is important in their lectures.

1. One way some lectures emphasize main points is by changing the tone or pitch of their voices. For example, a speaker’s voice may get softer or higher or lower when he or she states important ideas.

2. Speakers may also change their rate of speech; that is, they may slow down as they discuss terms, they will pause after each word or phrase in a sentence. This is a way of telling you that the definition is important and you should write it down.

3. A third way lectures may signal to you that they are going to discuss important material is by listing and numbering points. They may directly state that there are “three main reasons” or “four important affects” as they begin discussing a particular topic. Often, a speaker will identify each separate reason or with words such as first, second and finally, or one reason, another reason, and a final reason.

4. Another fairly obvious way lecturer’s point out important information is by writing on the chalkboard. Unfortunately, not all instructors are conscientious about writing all their main ideas on the chalkboard. But you can be sure that if your instructor does take the time to write a word or phase or figure down, it is important.

5. What also can lecturers so to highlight important ideas? Sometimes, they may announce straightforwardly that idea is especially important by saying something like “One important fact that you must keep in mind is . . .” The instructor may even hint that this information will be included in the exam.

6. Another common way lecturers introduce important ideas is by asking a rhetorical question. What do I mean by a rhetorical question? It is a question that the instructor doesn’t expect a student to actually answer; instead, the instructor intends to give the answer in the lecture.

7. Finally, many speakers give nonverbal clues as to what is important. They provide clues through their movements and actions as well as their words. For example, some lectures walk toward their audience as they make a major point. Others may use hand gestures or pace back and forth as they present key ideas. Although every speaker is different, most instructors so use some nonverbal clues to emphasize points and after a while you should be able to notice the more typical signals of your different instructors.

So, in conclusion, if you pay close attention to the words and actions of your instructors as they lecture, you should have many clues as to what ideas are most important and worth writing down.