

**Good notes** can mean the difference between merely adequate or superior performance in many classes (or the difference between failing and passing). Most of the important material in lecture classes will be covered in the lectures. If you have mastered the art of taking notes, you will have a tremendous advantage when exam time rolls around. The following list is a collection of hints from various sources – try them out and see what works for you!

**Go to class.** Even if it seems deadly boring, it is important that you know what the instructor sees as important – and you can't get it anywhere else. This is also your best chance to ask questions and to get assignments clarified. Unless you know that you are dealing with an "expert," never trust anyone else's notes.

If you can, **sit near the front.** You will find it easier to concentrate and understand what's going on. Also, don't underestimate the appearance of interest – there is a certain amount of subjectivity in almost every grade you receive.

**Have a positive attitude.** Develop an interest in the subject. No knowledge is worthless. You won't remember what you consider uninteresting and irrelevant.

**Use a looseleaf or multiple section notebook.** With a looseleaf notebook you can add handouts to your notes at appropriate spots. Keep all material from each course together and each course separate from all other courses.

**Set up your notebook according to a format that works for you.** If you don't have a format, or feel that you need improvement, try the following. Start each class on a new page with the date and topic being discussed listed at the top. Take lecture notes on the right hand page only. Use the left

hand page for questions, formulas, charts, summaries, your own thoughts, notes from readings that tie in to this part of the lecture, etc.

**Prepare for class before you arrive.** Read assignments before class whenever possible. Lectures make a lot more sense if you have a general idea of what it's all about. Review yesterday's notes just prior to class in order to get tuned in to the material again. Arrive early if possible, but definitely not late. The main point of the whole lecture is often given in the opening statement.

**Listen.** Be sure you understand what is being said. Listen for ideas and concepts. Don't get bogged down in trying to take elaborate notes, or you may lose track of what is being said. Concentrate on the lecture. You can't get important points down while thinking about Saturday's plans. Be alert for signal words and what they mean: "The bottom line is..." "In contrast..." "But most of all..." "On the other hand..." If you don't understand something, ask questions.

Remember, **your goal is to take notes, not dictation**, so use an outline form if possible. Develop your own system of indenting, underlining, etc. to indicate main points versus details. Be brief, but be sure to get the main ideas. Use your own words – get the ideas down, not necessarily the fancy phrases. However, there are **some things that you should always write down:** names, dates, significant events, instructor's biases (if identifiable), points repeatedly stressed, formulas, derivations, charts, drawings, lists on the chalkboard, and instructor's examples.

**Develop a system of symbols** to mark things that the instructor emphasizes (stars, exclamation points, arrows, double lines, etc.).

**Leave blank spaces** for words, ideas, etc. that you think you missed, or know, but don't have time to write down.

**Use understandable, consistent abbreviations.** Make up your own if you like – it doesn't matter what you use as long as you can understand them. Some common examples are:

p – page	w/ – with
ch – chapter	w/o – without
# – number	i.e. – that is
ex – example	e.g. – for example

**Pay as close attention to the end of the lecture as you do to the beginning.** Lecturers do get lost on tangents sometimes, and then try to jam a lot of important material into the last few minutes of class.

Now that you have this set of perfect notes, what do you do with them?

1. Review your notes as soon after class as possible, but within no more than 24 hours.
2. Fill in the blanks you left during class.
3. Record any ideas of your own.
4. Reduce facts and integrate them into concepts.
5. At least once a week, review all the notes from that week. It will really help you to grasp the major concepts.
6. Compare your notes with your readings. Note major points, discrepancies, etc. Identify gaps in your understanding and try to fill them in.
7. As you begin to study/review for exams, it may be helpful to condense things one more time. Final reviews can be done by running quickly through these summaries.

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