Taking Good Lecture Notes

In taking notes, should notes be in your own words?

Not necessarily! Remember, the purpose is to record the lecturer's ideas for later study, so capture the ideas in any way that is best for you. Don't waste valuable time trying to find fuzzy synonyms for the lecturer's precise words. Use your own words later, when you have had a chance to understand more fully the lecturer's ideas.

Should you reflect on the ideas during a lecture?

No! If you stop to reflect on idea number one, the chances are great that when your mind finds its way back to the on-going lecture, you will hear the lecturer say, "And idea number four is . . ." Reflection is valuable but must be done later. Your job in the classroom is to capture the ideas on which to reflect outside the class. It's a matter of priority.

Should you make a note on the instructor's headings?

Yes! To have well-organized notes, you need to listen attentively to detect the instructor's main heading and sub-headings. You can then list under these headings the ideas, facts, examples, and details. If you cannot detect such headings, take notes anyway. After the lecture, it is up to you to impose some organization upon what appears to be disorganization. Do this by clustering. The thinking that you do in trying to organize the material will pay off handsomely with deeper understanding and longer remembering.

Does pre-reading a textbook chapter help note-taking?

Yes! Often an instructor's classroom lectures will follow the topics in the order in which they appear in the textbook. By pre-reading your textbook chapters, you will be sufficiently familiar with the material in the lecture so that you can anticipate points and easily follow the development of the topic.

How do you cope with a lecturer who talks much too fast?

Use a two-page system. On the left-hand page record only the main ideas in a bold, non-formal way. Make sure that you grasp the key words. Immediately after lecture, as well as during lulls in the
lecture itself, record as many pertinent details as you can on the right-hand page. Record the details opposite the main ideas which they support. In effect, you will have a fairly full lecture in brief form on the left, which will be easy to study for a review, and full page of supporting details on the right.

Should you type your lecture notes?

Definitely not! Time is one ingredient that college students never have enough of. One sure way to waste time is to do the same job twice. The mind cannot concentrate on two activities simultaneously, that is, typing and studying. Typing is a hard task requiring one's full concentration: so is studying. So do it right the first time. Write legibly!

Should you take your lecture notes in shorthand?

No! Before you can study the ideas and facts, the shorthand notes must be transcribed. Transcribing and typing take a lot of energy and time with little or no learning taking place during the process. You are not in the classroom to record the lecturer's every word: rather, you are there to capture his ideas. Besides, after taking notes in longhand, you can study immediately. Shorthand notes are no good until transcribed.

How about using tape recorders or cassettes?

Don't use tape recorders or cassettes. This practice sounds like a good idea, but it isn't. When the lecture is on tape, you cannot review the lecture in five or ten minutes as other students can; you have to replay the entire tape. If you take notes later by replaying the lecture, you have wasted valuable time; you could have done the note-taking in class in the first place. Besides, if you have only tapes, review will take as much time as the original series of lectures, and you have done no work or your own in organizing and really learning the ideas.

from Walter Pauk's How to Study in College
"Ferris Wheel" Type Map

Key Point

Supporting Information

Supporting Information

Supporting Information

Minor Detail

Example
Taking an Essay Exam

1. RELAX
Take a deep breath and calm yourself. A slow, careful beginning can save you the time and points that a false start steals. Don't waste energy getting upset.

2. READ THE DIRECTIONS
Read the general directions. How many questions are you asked to answer? Do you have a choice—three out of five, for example? Pay special attention to terms such as discuss, explain, compare, or contrast, for they determine the focus or directions of your answer.

3. READ THE WHOLE TEST
Make a quick preliminary reading. While reading select the questions you can answer best and jot down the most immediate ideas or facts that come to mind.

4. PLAN YOUR TIME
Allot each question a length of time. Sometimes questions are labeled "25 minutes" or "40 minutes" but, if not, figure out how much time each question is worth. A 25-point question on a 100-point test would be worth on fourth of your total test time.

5. BEGIN WITH AN EASY QUESTION
Select a question that you can answer and concentrate on it alone. Read it carefully. What does the question ask for?

6. OUTLINE AN ANSWER
When you are sure you understand the question, briefly outline an answer. Construct a thesis or general statement which answers the question. Under it list topics or groups of like information that prove, support, or develop you statement. Under each topic list possible examples, illustrations, and supporting facts. Also use an outline to answer a question when you find you are short of time. You may get half or more credit!

7. WRITE THE ANSWER
Carefully following your outline, begin to write with your thesis statement. Here also is the place to define terms, mention a historical period, or give any further information which will pin
down the question. You may wish to tell your reader how you plan to proceed with your development.

8. PROOFREAD
Allow five minutes to proofread your answer for omitted words or careless spelling errors and punctuation errors.

Other Key Words in Essays

COMMENT: COMMENT gives you freedom to express your own opinion in relation to the subject matter.

CRITICIZE: CRITICIZE means to point out the weakness as well as the advantages of the idea presented. It is not necessarily finding fault. It indicates approval as well as disapproval.

DEFINE: Provide the meaning of a term. A definition is not an example or illustration.

DESCRIBE: enumerate or list the special features of the topic. Show how the topic is different from similar or related items. Give an account of, tell about, give a word picture of.

DEMONSTRATE: Show by example.

DIFFERENTIATE OR
DISTINGUISH: When things are approximately the same class, the word "differentiate" or "distinguish" is used. Show the differences.

EVALUATE: Express an opinion concerning the worth or merit. Give the good and bad points, appraise, give an opinion regarding the value of.

IDENTIFY: Show recognition. Ex: "Identify each picture by its title and name the artist."

ILLUSTRATE: Give examples.

JUSTIFY: Show good reasons for; give your evidence; present fact to support you position.
**LIST OR NAME:** Present a group of names or items in a category. List in concise form.

**OUTLINE:** Give information systematically in headings and subheadings.

**STATE:** Indicate briefly. No discussion is required.

**SUMMARIZE:** Present in condensed form; give the main points briefly.

**TRACE:** Present items in the order of time; follow the course of; give a description of progress.
Preparing for Examinations

I. Preparation for an exam should begin the first day of class.

A. Clues about what will be expected of the student are usually given by the instructor early in the course.
   1. Note these in a special place in your notebook.
   2. These notes will be valuable by giving you a direction to your studies.

B. Take careful notes at each class meeting, not just when exam time comes.
   1. Concentrate on what the instructor says, not on how he says it.
   2. Attend all lectures so as not to miss anything you might be tested on.
   3. Take complete and legible notes so you can profit from them when you study, and mark important facts (*).
   4. Remain alert to clues about what you will be tested on.

II. Be prepared

A. Have material thoroughly mastered.
   1. Have it organized so you can recall for essay examinations.
   2. Reread for recognition in objective examinations.

B. Prepare by reviewing.
   1. Review notes from class and from textbooks.
   2. Review key words.
   3. Make a set of summary notes if material is extensive.

C. Schedule your review.
   1. Used spaced practice.
   2. Keep review sessions short.
   3. Review your schedule to allow for extra practice for a particular test.

III. Begin concentrated study for an exam at least a week before it is scheduled.

A. Try and determine what will be asked by the instructor.
1. Ask yourself how each main idea could be phrased as a test question.
2. Take advantage of clues and hints from your instructor.
3. Be ready for these questions.
4. Don't study only these questions.
5. Review the clues you have noted, and emphasize these areas as you study.
6. Review your notes to see what was emphasized, and review especially the area you have marked (*).

B. Read all assignments thoroughly in view of what your instructor has lectured on.
   1. Underline or bracket, lines that help your understanding of the lecture.
   2. Summarize or predict test questions in the margins of the book while they are fresh in your mind.

C. Having a general idea what the exam will emphasize, begin to study.
   1. Use your text to clear up anything you don't understand in the lecture.
   2. Study your notes every night.
      a. Aim at both a memorization of facts and the ability to relate this material on reflection to what you already know--this will give you valuable original ideas.
      b. Start early reviewing your notes so the week of the exam will be more meaningful to you.

IV. Studying for essay and objective examinations

   A. Objective examinations are **not** easier.
      1. Use equivalent preparations for both.
      2. Study for recall in essays.
      3. Study for recognition and recall of facts in objective exams.

   B. Principle difference is in organization.
      1. We need more careful structure for essay exams.
      2. We need to plan to recall main ideas and details.

V. ... Answer questions according to the **course context**, not

   A. According to the latest newspaper article, or magazine.
   
   B. According to your opinion.
VI. Attitude is important

A. If you are prepared, you should be confident.
   1. An exam gives you a chance to show what you know.
   2. It gives you a chance to correct deficiencies.
   3. It shows you what you need to know better for the final exam.

B. Don't be so tense that you "blow up".
   1. Get to class in plenty of time.
   2. Practice deliberate relaxation before you start.

VII. Thorough preparation will be rewarded.

Suggestions for Final Examinations

1. Set up a new time table for the three weeks just before the final examinations. Reserve regular periods--at least six--for the overall review of each course. Use these times for intensive study but do not overextend yourself. Plan for reasonable thought to the twenty-four hours just prior to each examination. To the fullest extent possible, arrange your activities so that you will arrive at the examination room rested, well prepared, and confident of your ability to succeed.

2. During the final review periods, bring together all the materials of the course, lecture notes, manual, reference notes, and memoranda from the text. Divide them into convenient review sections and set definite goals to achieve during each session.

Regardless of the type of examination you expect, work out a master outline, listing the main ideas of the course, and the principal subdivisions. Then think over the essential contributing points. Where it will help, make tables, diagrams, brief outlines, or sentence summaries.

When you think you know the material, try group discussions with others taking the course.

3. Then put yourself to the test: Make a trial run. A day or so before the examination, select from your list of questions compiled during the term about as many as you think you can actually expect,
and set aside the amount of time you will be allowed. If you like, hang a DO NOT DISTURB sign on your door. Then take the examination. Try to practice taking the test in similar atmosphere, context and state. Think through the questions and write down the answers in full. Observe closely the conditions of the examination room, and work as if your were to be scored. No expert golfer would take part in a tournament without trying out a new course ahead of time. In a sense, taking an examination is like playing in a tournament.

You may doubt the necessity of the trial run, assuming that it will require more time than you can afford. But more time spent in preparation means less effort and worry during the examination. Working in this way, you can see what lies ahead. In your own room where you are not tense, you can test your rate of work and then analyze your performance.

Good preparation for an examination means hard work and exacting scholarship. It means struggle, discomfort, accomplishment. It is a way of chiseling the mind and making it precise so that you think without fuzziness but with imagination, and you learn to translate your thoughts into words with concreteness and without redundancy. Working in this way, you learn the satisfaction of superb preparation.

4. Finally, take the examination itself in stride. Plan your time, follow instructions, analyze your questions. Then pace yourself as you work.

If a question is difficult, use common sense; try to reason it out. Bring into play what you know about other parts of the course material; associate similar background material from other courses. In short, THINK. You will probably discover resources you didn’t know you possessed.