

Listening, Note-taking, and Using Visual Organizers

Listening

You may find that reading the text before class will provide you with an overview for the lecture. However, some students find that by going to class first, they get a better sense of what is important and find it easier to focus their reading based on the lecture and recommendations of the instructor. You will need to determine what works best for you based on your learning style and the instructional style of your professor.

Regardless of when you read the text, listening with questions in your mind or written on paper will help you to stay focused on the lecture. Some questions you might want to ask include:

- What do you already know about the subject?
- What do you need to know?
- What are the main ideas?
- What are the important details?
- What are some oral cues I should be listening for, such as: examples, order of importance, sequence?
- How could I apply this?
- How does this relate to what I read in my textbook?
- What don't I understand about this?

Try to listen with an open mind. Don't jump to conclusions or make assumptions before you hear all the information.

It is a fact that we think at a much greater speed than the lecturer can speak. So you'll need to keep your mind focused. Taking notes helps you to keep your mind focused and provides the best way to record the information that is covered in class.

Note-Taking

Note-taking is the primary method for documenting and summarizing the important information covered in your classes. Because you will be dependent on your class notes for study, you want to be sure that you get as much of the information on paper as possible.

There are two basic ways to take notes:

Mapping allows you to capture the big picture. While limited in the amount that you can note, it can be used as a way to:

- Preview text.
- Preview chapters.

- Organize ideas before writing an essay.
- Take notes when the instructor tends to lecture in a holistic style (skips around).

Cornell Notes allow you to outline main ideas and details to whatever extent you need to note the information. This format can be used to:

- Outline text.
- Organize writing for a term paper.
- Take notes when the instructor lectures in a linear style (step-by-step).

In order to be sure that you have captured all the important information and to be certain that you can interpret your notes, you should always review your notes shortly after the class is over. In some cases, especially if you tend to be a "big picture" learner, you may want to team up with more "detailed" learners in your class.

Be creative when you review and edit your notes. Use highlights, numbers, arrows or other symbols to clarify and evaluate the information. Combine notes from your text with your class notes. Ask more questions, such as, "What information might be included as a test question?"

You might want to make up some flash cards on important terms or concepts you think you will need to define on tests as you go along. That way you can start drilling yourself right away and can easily review these terms throughout the course.

Using Visual Organizers

The best way to fully understand new material is through the process of **elaboration**. The processes of rephrasing, applying, analyzing, and otherwise manipulating the information allow you to **understand at a deeper level and to make the information your own**.

You can help yourself to elaborate by using the chart showing questions at all cognitive levels. By asking and answering these questions, you process the information at high levels of thinking and better assure your understanding and ability to apply important concepts.

Another way to elaborate and to assist your memory is to organize the information into visual formats using visual organizers which include: illustrations, maps, tables, charts, webs, etc. The process of putting the information into these cognitive frames supports your understanding at high levels of cognition. Once information is in a visual format, you remember it more easily by "seeing" it in your mind's eye during testing or for application in the future.

By elaborating new information from your reading and lectures, you will learn the information more effectively and thoroughly; and you will find that you won't have to spend as much time preparing for tests.