Getting the Most from Lectures

What is the purpose of a lecture?

Lectures provide an opportunity to give a large number of students an overview of the weekly topics. They are an excellent resource, as the content is often synthesised from a variety of academic sources. As lectures are an overview, it is expected that you will do further research into the subject area.

The importance of preparation

Before you attend the lecture, prepare by skimming through the important texts for the week. These could be your unit outline, textbook, weekly readings, and lecture notes if available. Printing lecture slides before the lecture can help give your note-taking a focus:

• You can familiarise yourself with the key concepts and terminology
• You can identify key points and take more efficient notes
• If you are thinking about the topic, you can engage with the lecture effectively.

The importance of listening

During a lecture, it is important to be an active listener. Active listening involves paying attention to others and responding so as to gain a mutual understanding. To improve your active listening skills you need to practise. Pay attention to the person speaking and try not only hear what they are saying, but understand the entire message.

What kind of notes should I take?

Taking notes on the main ideas in a lecture will improve your understanding of the ideas your lecturer is conveying and is an important strategy to help you stay focused. Use these guidelines to help you with your note-taking in lectures:

• Write down the main points. The lecturer’s tone of voice, volume, or directions may be an indication of the main points.
• Write down or underline important terms, phrases, and names, which will help improve familiarity with new terms and ideas
• Make notes of points of interest to you; this is both an aid to memory and a subsequent source of ideas, thoughts, and inspiration for future assignments.

• Make notes of points that are still unclear so you can ask your lecturer/ tutor or do further research later.

• Make notes that expand on the information that is delivered on the slide.

• Include references so you can find sources again if you need to refer to them in future.

**When writing your notes**

• Be brief. Record phrases, words and names, rather than full sentences.

• Avoid copying. Focus on listening and use your own words to process ideas.

• Use abbreviations or symbols. For example: ? = I don’t understand this or follow up later.

• Use initials for names or concepts after writing them in full the first time they appear. For example, Jean Piaget might be referred to as JP or Evidence Based Practise might be referred to as EBP.

• Leave space in the margins or between lines so you can clarify notes later.

**Following up on lectures**

If there is content in the lecture that you need to clarify, ask the lecturer at the end of the lecture. You can also use the workshops, tutorials and the UCLearn unit discussion forum to clarify and discuss the lecture material. Review your notes as soon as possible after your lecture. When reviewing the lecture content, make the most of the review by:

• Adding details that you remember.

• Adding questions highlighting areas that you need to follow up for further understanding.

• Making connections between the different lecture content as well as with your broader reading.

**Tips for students from non-English speaking backgrounds**

If English is not your first language, lectures may be difficult to understand. The lecturer may speak fast, use idioms, deliver culturally-specific content or use unfamiliar vocabulary.

To help you get more out of your lectures you could:
• Share your notes with other students so together you can write clearer summaries.
• Check your UCLearn unit site for recordings of the lecture to revise the content.
• Listen to as much English as possible. This could include listening to lecture recordings multiple times to reinforce learning.
• Widen your knowledge of idiomatic English by chatting with Australians or watching Australian television programs.
• Ask your peers or tutors for help if you don’t understand some of the culturally-specific content.
• Read widely to improve your vocabulary.

**Useful Links**

Getting The Most out of Lectures, University of Sydney: