

Taking Notes for Someone Else

These are some practical suggestions for taking notes for someone else, as well as strategies to help you improve your own notetaking abilities.

General Info:

- Be sure of your purpose and the speaker's purpose.
- Attend all lectures.
- Sit up front so you can see and hear better.

Format:

- Record the date, place, topic/title and presenter.
- Number your pages.
- Use dark ink and write on one side of the page.
- Use a double entry notetaking system (see "Cornell Notetaking System" handout)
- Write neatly. Make notes complete and clear enough to understand when you come back to them.
- Use shorthand ('Fe' for iron, '=' for equals, '@' for at, etc.) and abbreviations. Feel free to develop your own set of abbreviations, but please put a key at the top of the page so your notes can be understood.
- Highlight important items with asterisks(*) or draw circles or boxes around critical info. Mark important ideas, terms, concepts with different colors, underlines, or asterisks. Indentation, underscoring and starring are also effective for indicating relative importance of items. Show uncertainty with a circled question mark.
- Leave plenty of white space for later additions. Skip lines. Leave space between main ideas.

What to write:

- Definitely copy:
 - * *Anything written on the board or presented on an overhead.*
 - * *Any info that is repeated or emphasized. Ways to emphasize include: tone or gesture, repetition, illustration on board, reference to text, and use of cue words such as: finally, remember, most important, another cause, etc.*
 - * *All numbered or listed items.*
 - * *All terms and definitions.*
 - * *Examples.*
 - * *New words and ideas.*
- If the instructor refers to the text, mark the page number in notes to refer.
- When you cannot keep up with the speaker, jot down key nouns and verbs so that you can return to the latter and ask questions/fill in gaps. Leave blanks for words, phrases or ideas you miss. Ask a classmate to fill in the gaps.
- Include comments the class makes that the professor agrees with.

Listening:

- Listen carefully to what is being said.
- Pay attention to qualifying words(sometimes, usually, rarely, etc.)
- Notice signals indicating that a change of direction is coming (but, however, on the other hand)
- Look for meaning and implications; be an active listener.

Additionally:

- Ask questions if permitted; if not, jot down questions in your notebook.
- Soon after the presentation, review your notes, rewrite skimpy or incomplete parts, and fill in gaps you remember but didn't record.

©Academic Skills Center, Dartmouth College 2001