Taking Notes in Class

Having good lecture notes to review can determine how well students will perform on assignments and tests. Reasons for taking class notes are

- It forces students to listen and test their understanding of the lecture.
- When students write down main points, it helps them to remember better later.
- Students have a personalized copy of the lecture, which is easier for them to understand.
- Students have a written documentation of the whole course needed for doing assignments or studying for tests.

Here are some suggestions for writing effective notes.

1. Go to class prepared.
   - Get to class before it starts and stay until the end to get all the information.
   - Use a binder so pages can be taken out or rearranged and handouts can be put in.
   - Read assigned material before class to become familiar with the topic.
   - Have highlighters available to mark important sections or to highlight main points.

2. Instructors give clues to what is important to write down.
   - Material they write on the board, overhead projector transparency or PowerPoint slide.
   - Items they repeat or expand with details.
   - Topics they emphasize by tone of voice, gestures, or amount of time devoted to each.
   - Word clues may indicate importance. If they say “Two points of view are...” or “Three reasons are....”, it is probably something important to copy down.
   - Topics included in summaries, on review sheets, or on web pages are noteworthy
3. Develop a consistent method for taking notes.

- Date your notes and write page numbers at the top for easy reference later. Don’t write notes on loose pieces of paper; have a section in a binder for each class.
- Use an outline system of letters, numbers, and indenting for main headings and sub headings. Indenting helps to distinguish major and minor details.
- Make your notes brief. Use key words and phrases and write in point form. You can add more details later.
- Use your own words, which will be easier to understand and remember, but copy specific facts, definitions, and formulas down exactly.
- Don’t fill in all the lines with notes. Leave spaces to add more details or missed information.
- Use a consistent system for abbreviations and terminology.
- Don’t try to write down everything that is said. Think about whether it is important before copying it down.

4. Edit and review notes after class.

- Shortly after class, within 24 hours is best, go back over your notes to fill in any missing details or rewrite words or sections that don’t make sense or are hard to read.
- Underline what you don’t understand, compare your notes with the textbook or ask your instructor to clarify.
- Write some key words or make up questions in the margin to identify important ideas from the lecture.
- Redo notes but in a different format than originally written. For example, make up study sheets for later use or create webs that connect information from each lecture; then you can add new information as you get it.