Three Steps to Effective Note Taking

Taking good notes is a crucial part of your learning success. Besides allowing you to keep a record of the key information presented by your instructor during class, good note-taking involves you in active listening strategies and encourages you to think as you organize ideas into different categories and levels of importance. Contrary to common beliefs, note-taking does not begin and end with each lecture. To be an effective note-taker you need to prepare before you go to class and do something with your notes after class. These are the three steps to effective note-taking.

Step One: Before Class

- **Read about the topic before you go to class.** Use the course outline or any other information the instructor gives you to determine what will be covered in class then pre-read before you go to class. At the very least, scan the reading to identify the key ideas and concepts. If you have assigned reading, make sure you do this before class.
- **Review the notes you took during the previous class** to remind yourself what you have learned about the topic so far.
- **Anticipate what you are going to learn in the class.** Have some questions in mind that you think will be answered during the lecture. Be prepared to be interested in the topic and recognize how it relates to the rest of the course content.
- **Select a good place to sit in the classroom.** Situate yourself in a location that minimizes internal and external distractions.

Step Two: During Class

- **Maintain concentration as you listen to the lecture.** Be aware if your thoughts start to wander and if they do gently bring yourself back to active listening.
- **Keep your eyes on the instructor.** Imagine you are having a one-on-one conversation with the instructor and you are listening to his or her part of the dialogue.
- **Listen out for and write down key points** using the background knowledge you have from previous classes and your pre-class reading activities. Do not try to write down everything the instructor says. Listen first and make a conscious decision about what the key point is that you need to write down.
- **Use a note-taking format that works for you** and remember to:
  - Write the topic and title on each page of notes
  - Number your pages
  - Leave plenty of white space
Write on one side of the paper only

- **Participate in class activities and class discussions.** Interaction with others will help you think more deeply and your notes will reflect this.

### Step Three: After Class

- **Schedule a regular time within 24 hours of the lecture to go over your notes.** Research shows that individuals forget 60% of information they have heard within 24 hours, so it is crucial you return to your notes to review the key information you learned during the lecture.

- **As you review, identify key concepts and supporting detail.** Underline, circle or write down what you determine are the important points covered in the lecture.

- **Re-organize your notes to make them more readable and suitable for study.** As you do this be careful not to simply copy your notes. Straight copying of notes takes a lot of time and is a passive activity with little learning value.