



Tips for students: getting the most from lectures

- 1 *You'll get a lot more from lectures if you do a little bit of thinking before you go in to class.* Think about what has been covered in sessions before and look in the course handbook to see how this week's work is likely to be assessed through assignments or exams. If the course documentation uses any specialist terms you haven't come across before, check these out before the class.
- 2 *Keep your course handbook on hand to see what areas your lectures are due to cover.* Remember that it is indeed your course. It's you who's going to have to learn the material, not your lecturers – they've already done it. So make sure you have all the details of what's on your agenda, and keep an eye on what's already been covered and what's still to come.
- 3 *Consider what the real purpose of lectures is nowadays.* Now there is so much material available on the web, including TED talks, open educational resources and learning packages, the lecture is seen by most lecturers as something more than just passing on information that you could have got anyway from a book or from the web. Lectures today are likely to be as much about making you think and posing you challenges as they are about simply delivering content. Your responsibility as a learner is to be active and engaged in lectures just as much as in any other area of your studies.
- 4 *Look really carefully at the intended learning outcomes.* Most course documents explain what students are required to learn in the form of such outcomes. They are often expressed as statements of what students will be expected to have become able to do at the end of a unit of study. Lecturers will often include the particular intended outcomes for each lecture – watch out for these and make sure you've got them to remind you later of what you're supposed to be aiming towards.
- 5 *Think about how you are going to retain information and your thoughts from the lectures.* Don't just take notes, make notes. Whether you make notes with pen and paper, on a laptop, on your phone or using Twitter, the notes you make in lectures are important resources for later study. Don't just rely on the presentation being available on the course VLE after class because it's your thoughts on what's being said that you need to retain. Take the view that you're only really learning if you're capturing important aspects of the lecture. So get your brain working, but don't just use it busily, use it wisely.
- 6 *Don't just switch off if you are given handouts in class or pointed to where the notes will be on the VLE for later use.* It's dangerously easy to think, 'Ah well, I've got all the slides, so I don't have to think hard about it now during the lecture – I can catch up later!' Actually, your time in class is particularly valuable as it's your best chance to interrogate the material, whether privately or by asking questions of the lecturer or peers.
- 7 *Resist the temptation to excessively multi-task.* It is possible to check your Facebook page and send texts and tweets in a lecture, but this is unlikely to improve your concentration unless you're focussed on the topic in hand. But don't be afraid to Google unfamiliar terminology and to check you've accurately recorded references.
- 8 *If you miss a lecture, remember that any notes provided by the lecturer are no substitute for having been there.* Use any available handouts or virtual copies of the slides and other

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resources to enable you to catch up on what you missed to fill at least some of the inevitable gaps in your understanding of the topic. But also try to talk to some people who were actually there, and get them to explain the main points to you, or check on the course VLE to see if there is ongoing discussion of the key topics.

- 9 *Make sure you do something to help you concentrate in the lecture, rather than just being a passive listener.* Don't be embarrassed to make notes even if folk around you are just sitting there doing nothing. If you find it helps you to jot down key points now and then, do it. Or maybe draw diagrams, tables or mind maps of what you are hearing and seeing, or use mind mapping software to record the ideas. It's your learning which will be assessed in due course, so make a good start on it right there and then in lectures. Think about what is really meant by what you see and hear, and capture the meaning. This keeps you alert, and helps to stop you becoming distracted from the class.
- 10 *Put things into your own words rather than just writing down or audio-recording what is said.* You need to think about what you're writing. Sometimes you will need to keep detailed notes, for example if you're expected to write down an exact definition or quotation. But for most of the time, what you should try to do is to capture for yourself the essence of what's being said and shown in lectures.
- 11 *Keep asking yourself: 'What am I expected to become able to do with this?'* When you're asking this, you can deliberately and consciously record your own thoughts so that they remind you of what seems to be expected of you.
- 12 *Watch out for cues you are being given by your lecturer.* Lecturers give all sorts of hints during any lecture by tone of voice, emphasis, body language and repetition. Sometimes they give these clues deliberately in order to get you thinking about how the material will be assessed or what kinds of approaches you should be taking to skills development or the acquisition of knowledge. Even more often, they do it subconsciously. Either way, you need to know what is really important, so that you can make sure you have a firm grip on such things when assessments loom up.
- 13 *Write down your own questions.* Every time there's something you can't quite understand, turn it into a short question and note it down. When you've captured these questions, you can find out the answers in your own time, looking them up or asking other people, or asking the lecturer. Or you could tweet questions to fellow attendees using a hashtag. If you haven't captured your questions in class, a few hours later you probably won't remember what they were, and then there's no chance at all of getting them answered.
- 14 *Note also your own reactions, feelings and thoughts.* Quite often in a lecture you'll 'see the light dawn' about something, but if you don't jot down something about what you are thinking, it might not happen again, even when you look back at your notes.
- 15 *At the end of the lecture, take action to help you retain information.* Whatever filing and recording system you use to keep track of what you are learning (whether paper notes, blogs or sections in your ePortfolio) keep these up to date so you can access them easily when you need to use them again for revision or to inform your professional practice.