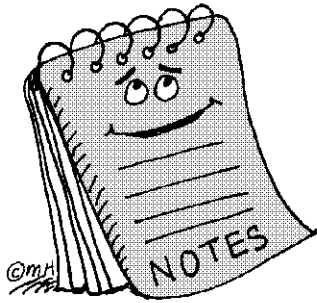


Dr. T's ~~Helpful Hints~~

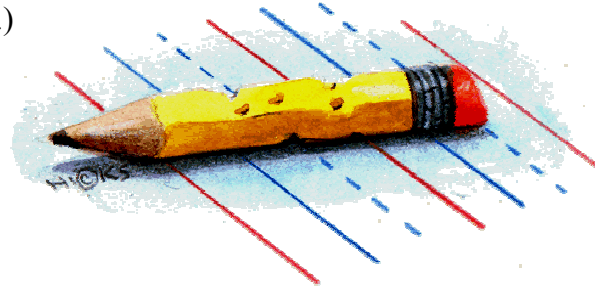


No. 31: Taking Notes in Class

Most students believe they know how to take notes. After all, they've been doing it for years. Unfortunately, a great deal of wasted energy goes into note taking, often at the expense listening and learning. This is not to say that taking notes is useless. To the contrary, notes can help you remember key points in a lecture and inspire thought if used correctly. Here are a few ideas that might improve your note taking efficiency.

- **First and foremost, it is important to *listen* to the lecture and *think* about what is being said.** Students often become too consumed with “writing everything down” that they tune out to what actually is being said. Looking at your notes later won't help you understand the lecture if you didn't listen the first time around. If you find yourself writing down the professor's words without knowing what is being said, it is time to re-evaluate how you are taking notes.
- **Do the assigned reading before the lecture.** This will familiarize you with what is going to be said in the lecture. If you are familiar with the subject matter, you will be less frantic about taking notes than if everything was unfamiliar. Although not all professors lecture directly on the readings (hint: I don't), there is usually significant overlap between the readings and the lecture to make this a worthwhile habit. Even if the lecture falls behind the syllabus, stay on top of the readings. It becomes progressively harder to play “catch up” as the academic term progresses.
- **Do not feel obligated take notes on everything the professor writes down or says.** An hour-long lecture usually contains only a few main points that could be summed up in a couple of minutes. Evidence supporting those main points usually fills out the remaining time. Try to filter out and jot down the main points in the lecture. Be more selective in taking notes on the evidence supporting the main points. Although it might be hard to determine what the main points of a lecture are at first, you should be able figure out the professor's lecturing style after a few classes, thereby making this task easier.
- **Develop a shorthand.** Abbreviate common words and phrases. This saves time.
- **Take notes after class.** This may seem dumb, but it is often useful to take five minutes after class to write down what you learned. This will help reinforce what you have learned. The sooner you do this, the better, although it doesn't hurt to do it several hours later to see how much you retained. You will surprise yourself on how much your short-term memory stores and writing it down will preserve these thoughts in your long-term memory.

- **Make friends.** Get a study group together early in the academic term – two, three or four people will suffice. Set aside time each week to compare notes. Maybe one of your friends picked up something that you missed, and vice versa. This takes away the stress of having to capture everything that was said in lecture. Your study mates can also cover for you in the event you miss a lecture, but don't use your group an excuse for skipping class. Make your group sessions enjoyable by meeting on a Friday for coffee or before going bowling. Compare notes for twenty minutes and then spend the rest of the hour making fun of the professor. (Making fun of your professor is a sacred duty that all college students must maintain through the ages.) Also, setting up a study group early will help you study for exams later.



LEGAL DISCLAIMER: “Dr. T’s Helpful Hints” are only suggested practices and do not guarantee academic success. You are responsible for making the choices that determine how well you do in school. Choose wisely.