Getting the most out of lectures

What is in this guide

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What to do before the lecture

Stay informed
• Check lecturer announcements regularly in case the lecture has been cancelled, or the venue changed.
• See if the lecture notes (ie: the powerpoint presentation that the lecturer will use) have been uploaded. If so, print them out and read them before the lecture. You can also use them in the lecture as a starting point for your own notes.

Prepare yourself
• Look at how this lecture will fit with the unit outline/unit objectives.
• Ask yourself: What do I know about this topic?
• Look over your previous notes to make a connection between what you have already learnt and what this lecture will cover.
• Ask yourself: What am I hoping to find out? What will I learn? This will help you to listen out for important information that is particularly relevant to your needs.
• Do any required or recommended readings and jot down any questions that you have.
• Check before the lecture to see if the lecturer has posted any lecture notes. If there are pre-prepared lecture notes, read them!
• Think about how you will take notes from the lecture. Take a look at the different note taking techniques (see Taking Notes Quick Guide) and plan to try the ones that might work for you. You might like to record the lecture so that you can listen to it again or work with other students to share lecture notes.
• Arrive on time so that you hear the introduction to the lecture and can collect any handouts.
What to do during the lecture

Make sure you don’t get distracted

- You need to concentrate on the lecture so make sure you are well prepared and will be comfortable.
- Eat something before the lecture.
- Consider sitting away from your friends.
- Turn your phone off.
- Sit where you can see and hear clearly.

Listen actively

- Consider the lecturer’s purpose. This will help you to listen actively for the information that you need to take note of.
- Ask yourself:
  - Is the lecturer giving us an overview of a broad topic to make it easier for me to gain understanding or is it a more in-depth coverage of a specific area?
  - Is the lecturer assuming that I have read about the topic and is therefore delivering information at a more in-depth level?
  - Is the lecturer providing me with ideas/examples/research to supplement my textbook or readings?
  - Where do these ideas come from (e.g. text book, journals, lecturer’s experience)? Is it easy for me to access these same ideas? If not then you need to take good notes!
- Listen out for the main ideas or concepts, and the relevant information that supports these. This will be much easier if you have prepared well for the lecture. You can also use the lecturer’s cues as a guide: for example, what are the words/phrases/concepts that are written on the lecture notes/powerpoint presentation, or are often repeated.
- Try to question what is being said (see Reading critically Quick Guide). Get the main ideas and/or details down BUT also try to make your own comments about these ideas. If there is something that you don’t understand or want to question later, highlight or put a question mark next to this information to make it stand out.
- Try to save the analysis or emotional response for after the lecture. While it is important to think about what you are hearing, it is also important that you continue to concentrate on taking down the main points rather than wasting time on one point. Again, highlight or put an asterisk next to this point so that you can come back to it after the lecture.

Remember, it is generally impossible to write down all that is said in a lecture. Don't treat a lecture like dictation. You don't need to write every word. Be prepared and be selective. This will help you to find a way to listen for understanding as well as take notes so that what you gain from the lecture will be useful to you in the long term.
What to do after the lecture

- Try to read over your notes as soon as possible after the lecture.
  Ask yourself the following questions:
  - Do I understand what I have written?
  - Are the main idea/s and the supporting points clear?
  - Is there anything I can add to the notes? Do I need to fill in any gaps?
  - Do I need to rewrite the notes to make them easier to understand?
  - Do I need to do further reading to clarify or add to the ideas?
  - Are there questions I still need/want answered? What didn’t I understand?
- You might like to discuss the lecture with friends afterwards.
- Reflect on the lecturer’s purpose (see above) and presentation style and think about how this can help you to prepare to get the most out of the next lecture. Does the lecturer:
  - Give an introduction or overview of the whole lecture?
  - Use overheads or powerpoints to highlight/summarise main points?
  - Give outline/summary sheets to be used in the lecture?
  - Give information relating to the lecture or upload the lecture notes on MySCU?
  - Mention additional sources of information?
  - Give tips on studying the subject and preparing for an assignment or exam?

Related Quick Guide

Taking notes