

Listening Tips

One of the keys to successfully listening to and comprehending all kinds of lectures is being able to extract the main idea.

Another invaluable study skill for university students is the ability to take sufficient, quality notes. Important points to remember are:

- Date your work and provide the relevant textbook chapter if applicable.
- Write legibly.
- Do not try to write down every word. This is an impossible task not worth attempting. Instead, write your notes in *outline* form.
- Before the lecturer starts, draw a vertical line on your paper about two centimeters from the left-hand edge. Take notes on the large area and use this left strip for titles, topics, short phrases, etc. This left-hand area becomes your outline of the material that you write down in the right-hand area.
- Give yourself plenty of space between pieces of information, especially when the speaker changes topics. These spaces are helpful because when you review your notes, additions may be made. Also, if your notes are not crowded they are much easier to read.
- Use a different color pen for each reading of the lecture.
- If the speaker writes words or draws diagrams on the board, copy them down. They must be important.
- Try to visualize what the speaker is talking about by forming a mental image. Use your own pictures, charts, or diagrams rather than written text whenever this is possible.
- When you take notes, concentrate on the *content* words, not the function words. Shorten or omit function words such as articles and prepositions. Use colons, parentheses, abbreviations, arrows, stars, underlining, colored highlighters – anything that works for you.

◆ **Example:**

“The heart has four chambers.” [original]

Heart = 4 chambers [your notes]

◆ **Example:**

“Strenuous exercise causes the heart rate to rise from a normal rate of about 70 beats per minute to up to 140.” [original]

Exercise ↑HR : 70 bpm → 140 bpm [your notes]

- **Abbreviate** words that are repeated through the lecture. However, make sure you can understand your abbreviations later.
- When the speaker pauses, repeats information, writes on the board, or takes a drink of water, etc., use this time to write in the left-hand area.
- Pay particular attention to **transitional techniques** that are used, because they will help keep you focused on the organization of your notes:
Listen for other **transitional** cue words:
 - ◆ “**In contrast to** bacteria, viruses...”
 - ◆ “Monocytes, **like** lymphocytes, are white blood cells...”
 - ◆ “**Therefore**, children in developing countries...”
 - ◆ “**Then**, an oximeter is placed on the patient to monitor...”
- **Indent** lower-level details. This helps you keep the main points standing out.
- Ask yourself **questions** as the lecture progresses, such as:
 - ◆ “What happens now?”
 - ◆ “What are the other functions besides the one s/he just named?”
 - ◆ “Why does this not occur?”
 - ◆ “What are the implications of this fact?”
 - ◆ “What does this mean to me?”
 Then, listen carefully for answers to your questions.
- If there are questions about the lecture in front of you, you can use these as an outline on which to take notes. This technique is also useful during listening comprehension examinations, as it helps you know which information to take notes on. This is true even for multiple-choice questions where you do not have the actual questions in front of you, only the possible answers.
- Finally, **keep going**. If you miss some information, do not panic. Do not ask your friend, “What was that?” You will miss more of what the speaker is saying. After the lecture, ask the lecturer to repeat what you missed or to clarify something you are not sure about. Do not be embarrassed. Chances are that someone else would like to ask the same question. **Remember: The only silly question is the one that is not asked!**
- **Review** your notes as soon as possible after you have taken them in order to reinforce the information and to remember points that you may not have had time to write. You may be able to add some details that you still remember. Also, you should highlight and underline important points to prepare for examination review later.