



**The
McGraw
Center**

for Teaching & Learning
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Listen Actively and Take Great Notes

Chances are you'll take quite a few lecture courses at Princeton. You can maximize what you learn in and from lecture by following three easy steps: 1) adopt active listening skills; 2) take clear, effective notes; and 3) review your notes within 24 hours of taking them.

Listen actively in lecture

- **Get to class early** so that you can choose a seat free of distractions and close to the lecturer.
- **Look over your notes from last time** and prepare for the day's lecture, anticipating themes, concepts, and ideas that the lecturer will present.
- **Listen both for main ideas** and for the relevant details that support them.
- **Pay particular attention** when the lecturer is analyzing, synthesizing, or processing information for you, such as when she makes a list, notes cause and effect, uses superlatives, or spends a lot of time explaining something.
- **Ask questions** when you don't understand something.

Take good notes during lecture using the Cornell Method of Note-taking

- Using only one side of your paper, draw a vertical line a few inches from the left side of the paper and a horizontal line a few inches up from the bottom of the page. (See reverse for an example.)
- **Take legible notes** in the central portion of your paper. Don't transcribe every word that the lecturer says. Rather, focus on main ideas, themes, and concepts, taking down only those details, examples, illustrations, or formulae that will help you to remember the central point(s) of the lecture.
- **Use consistent, understandable abbreviations** whenever possible.
- **Skip lines to indicate transitions** from one thought or idea to the next.
- **Leave noticeable blanks** for words, ideas, or dates that you didn't catch but can fill in later.
- **Put question marks in the left-hand margin** to indicate that you should do further investigation on this section of your notes, either on your own or by going to office hours.

Fill in and review notes after lecture

- **Review your notes** within 24 hours of taking them. Students forget 50% of what they learn if they don't review within 24 hours.
- **Fill in any blanks** you left and answer any questions you may have from lecture.
- Use the left-hand margin to **annotate your notes indicating key terms, concepts, dates**, and any other important information that will help you to review for exams or write papers.
- Use the bottom margin to **write a summary** of each page of notes—or, if it makes more sense, summarize at the end of one set of lecture notes.

Following these steps will help you to store information in your long-term memory and better learn your course material the first time around — a real timesaver when it comes to reviewing for quizzes, tests, and exams.

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