LECTURES AND SEMINARS

You may be enrolled in a unit delivered totally or supplemented with an online component. Here you can find tips and advice on how to get the most out of your online learning experience.

Here you can find useful tips and advice on how to get the most out of lectures and seminars, including effective note taking.

About lectures and seminars

Lectures

Lectures are larger classes which allow the lecturer/presenter to provide information on specific topics within the syllabus. In the first week of each of your units, you will be given a unit outline which provides you with a run-down of the topics within the unit syllabus to be covered at each lecture. The information taught in the lecture is usually followed up in a tutorial. Read your unit outline at the start and regularly throughout the semester.

Seminars

Seminars can take a number of forms depending on the unit. Some are larger and similar to lectures, whilst others are taught in smaller groups more like tutorials. Seminars are generally more interactive, however, allowing you the opportunity for group discussion and collaborative learning.

How to prepare for a lecture

Identify your own motivation. Decide what you want to get from a lecture. Do you want it to add to your own reading notes, explain difficult concepts, and/or give you clues about the exam? Write down questions you want the lecturer to answer.

Do the required reading. If you are familiar with the topic when you listen to the lecture, you will be able to contextualise what the lecturer is telling you. This will help you to make sense of what the lecturer is saying and to distinguish between more important and less important points.

Review and download lecture outlines, notes and/or PowerPoints on the web. Read and down-load these before the lecture. During the lecture, the lecturer will fill in gaps, expand on points, and give examples. If you are familiar with the organisation and main points of the lecture, you will find it easier to concentrate on and make sense of what the lecturer is saying.

Arrive before the lecture starts. This will ensure that you collect any handouts and hear the lecturer's introduction, which often outlines the lecture for you. Sit near the front of the lecture theatre - this can help you concentrate on the lecturer and avoid any distractions from other students.
Note-taking

Reasons to take notes

- Lecture notes provide a written record, which is available for future reference and revision
- Making lecture notes keeps you actively involved in the lecture; you are constantly thinking about and summarising the lecture as you write
- Making notes selectively encourages you to focus your attention on the structure and main issues of the lecture.

How much do you need to write?

- The quality of your lecture notes is more important than the quantity. Don't try to take down every word the lecturer says - learn to identify main points. (Experienced lecturers will give you 'signposts' like 'now this is important', 'the main points are... ', or 'you might want to write down this definition')
- If you have prepared for the lecture, you will be better able to decide which of the lecturer's comments are background information
- Often a lecturer will preview the contents of the lecture. Pay careful attention to this preview, noting the major issues
- If you are well-prepared, you will need to take fewer notes, and this will free you up to listen more.

How to make your notes effective

- Sit as close as possible to the lecturer and focus your attention on her/him
- Make a note of the date and the name of the presenter and number each page (this is useful when you come to revise later in the semester)
- Consider using the 'Cornell' system. Leave a wide column space (about one-third of the page width) down the side of your notes to make later editing notes, comments, and synthesis with other sources.
- Write with a dark pen on one side of the paper only. Leave spaces for later comments
- Listen and think before you write anything down
- Use key words and short sentences
- Abbreviate (NB for 'note this', devt for 'development', i.e. for 'that means', etc.)
- Use underlined headings and subheadings to break up your notes into manageable chunks
- Keep your notes together, preferably in a loose leaf file
- Don't worry about missing a point. Leave a space and fill it in later
- Sometimes lecturers display complicated charts and tables and explain them. Usually you can get copies of these, so it's better to listen and understand rather than to try to copy the chart or table.

Reviewing your notes after the lecture

Making notes during the lecture is only the first step. Remember that you will need to refer to your lecture notes when you prepare assignments and study for tests or examinations. Here are some tips:

- Review your notes after the lecture, highlighting important points, writing additional comments, filling in gaps, and identifying anything that is unclear
- Cross reference your lecture notes with your own reading notes and assignment topics
- You may find it useful to summarise lecture notes in your own words; this helps you to clarify the issues and to memorise what you have learned
If appropriate, use flow charts, diagrams or graphs, or concept maps to express the ideas more simply. Don't be afraid to use space.

Don't waste time re-writing your notes neatly - they are for your eyes only. Just make sure that they will still make sense to you when you prepare an assignment and revise for exams.

What to do if you can’t keep up with the lecturer

Like other skills, keeping up with the information being presented in a lecture takes a little practice. When you can't follow a lecture easily, leave plenty of space in your notes so that you can go back and add or edit. Often what you have missed will be later discussed in the tutorial.

You can also make a list of questions on points you don’t understand and make an appointment with the lecturer or with your class tutor to clarify these points.

Be specific with your questions - most lecturers are very busy and have only limited consultation time, so make every minute of the consultation productive. Always ask the most important questions first.

What do you do if you can’t understand the lecturer’s accent

If you are new to Australia, it may take a few weeks to get used to the Australian accent. A useful road-clearing strategy is to immerse yourself in the language by listening to Australian speech whenever you can. Listening to Radio National (810 on the AM band) will expose you to 'educated' Australian English and your ear will gradually become attuned to the Australian accent.

Access Blackboard Collaborate and iLectures

Your units may be supported with Blackboard Collaborate – an online virtual classroom where you can engage in lectures and tutorials with your lectures and tutors. Collaborate sessions are usually recorded and can be viewed as many times as you wish in the location of your choosing (provided you have adequate Internet access).

Many unit lectures are also recorded using the iLecture facility, which allows you to access recordings of your lectures or other video-based resources which may have been prepared by your lecturers. As with Collaborate, you can view iLecture recordings as many times as you wish.

See the Students tab in Blackboard for instructions on how to access and play iLecture recordings and Collaborate sessions.

Checklist for lectures and seminars

Before the lecture/seminar

- Make note of important terminology before class
- Decide what you hope to gain from this lecture
- Write down the questions you want the lecture to answer
- Do the required reading
- Access, download and read lecture outlines, notes, PowerPoint slides (if available)
- Arrange to get the lecture theatre early and collect any handouts.
During the lecture/seminar

- Sit near the front of the room to help you concentrate
- Clear your mind of all other matters so you can focus
- Make a note of the date and name of presenter
- If you are handwriting, write with a dark pen on one side of the paper
- Number the pages
- Write brief lecture notes
- Use abbreviations where possible
- Identify and write down key words
- Make sure your lecture notes will make sense when you revise for the exam
- Use headings and subheadings to organise your notes.

After the lecture/seminar

- Review your notes within 24 hours of having written them, this will enhance your chances of filling in anything you missed and of recalling them later.
- Highlight important points, filled in gaps, added comments, identified anything that is still unclear
- Cross-reference your lecture notes with your own reading notes and assignment topics.