Getting the Most Out Of Class Lectures

Prior to Class

- **Have the material read and homework completed.** This will enable you to have some questions for clarification prepared.
- **Have a list of questions prepared of items that you did not understand from the text.** The professor might answer this through the lecture; however, in case he/she doesn’t you will have the questions on hand rather than trying to remember it.
- **Have all materials ready.** Make sure that you have plenty of note paper and your class books are in the bag etc.

Getting to Class

- **Get to class early.** Arriving a few minutes early allows you time to pick a good spot, talk to classmates about assignments if clarification is needed and ask questions about the homework or previous nights reading.
- **Choose a location near the front.** It is somewhat true that individuals in the front are called on more which is a little more risky. However, this risk also provides one with motivation to “pay attention” and to have your reading assignments ready. An advantage to this is also that the instructor is usually more likely to answer any questions you may pose more promptly than individuals in the back of the class. Perhaps most importantly, sitting near the front minimizes distractions and improves your ability to focus on the lecture.

During Class

- **Take good notes.** Develop a system of effective note taking. Get down as much information as possible. Use abbreviations, symbols, or whatever you can do to get as much information as possible. Remember, writing things down word for word is time consuming and is rarely effective. It is more effective to “translate” the instructor’s words into your own, as this forces you to process the information as you go. Get as much information as possible down on the page. After class you can then fill in the blanks, write words out etc. Don’t wait too long or the “chicken scratches” will remain just that! Also, if the professor provides the Power Point slides, DON’T skip taking notes. Taking your own notes is a form of learning that you miss out on if you just rely on the provided slides.
- **Bring a tape recorder with a counter to class** (auditory learners, this is important to have). If you get lost or if your professor is going too fast you can write down the counter number where you got lost. That way you can cue up that portion of the lecture at a later time to gain a better understanding of the material. Write notes on it. The tape recorder is NOT a way to avoid note taking.
- **ASK QUESTIONS!!!.** It is not expected that you should know all the material just from reading the book. If that were the case, we wouldn’t have lectures. Professors know that they will need to clarify. Go ahead and let them. Let them earn their money by helping you out a little. If you have read the material and are prepared you have the right to ask for clarification. If you haven’t come to class prepared, ask for clarification anyway, the professor just might think you actually have prepared 😊.
- **Take some time to re-focus.** If you can maintain your attention on the lecturer for the entire 50 minutes without getting distracted then you are extremely unique. For the rest of us, it is easy to find
our minds wandering. For those who have tape recorders in class you can just mark down the time when you realized you “spaced” then review that section at a later time. If you find, however, that you are having a hard time re-focusing, then take a “mini-time-out”. Focus on something other than the lecture for one to two minutes then go back to the lecture. Missing two minutes of the lecture is better than trying to re-focus for the next 5 to 10 minutes.

At the End of Class

- **Ask classmates about any ideas you did not get or sections of your notes that you were unable to complete.** Try and arrange to do this with a classmate after every lecture. Take 3 to 5 minutes and see if you can “fill in all the blanks”.
- **Ask your professor about any additional information.** Usually the professor will stick around for a few minutes to answer any lingering questions. If he is busy then maybe you could ask him for his notes on that particular section, or arrange to meet during office hours.
- **Clean up your notes.** This is a good time also to fix all those chicken scratches and write out any incomplete sentences.

After Class

- **Take some time to review.** That same day, if possible, write out any key words or phrases that will help you remember key points of the lecture. Generate some sample test questions based upon the notes you have taken. Make sure that when you are reviewing that you put everything in your own words. If it’s your own you will remember it better than if you memorize what the professor said. She already made it her own; that’s why she remembers it so well.
- **Say it out loud.** After reviewing, tell someone what you picked up from the lecture that day. Say it out loud even if it’s to your self in front of a mirror or to your favorite pet. Your kitten might not understand the principles of thermodynamics any better, but you certainly will.
- **Review these notes at least once before you attend class again.** Take time to review your notes at least once before your next class. A good time for this is just before you read the next assignment or chapter. This will also allow you to make sure you understand the material. If you find that you still don’t understand something from the lecture you can ask follow up questions at the beginning of the next class.
- **Talk with your professor.** Most professors have open office hours during the week. You can usually locate these hours on your syllabus. These hours are specifically for you to visit with your professor to ask about any concepts you may not understand. Use this time! Your professor gets paid whether you come that hour or not so why not help him/her earn that money?