

Getting the Most from Class Lectures

Much of the information you need to know in high school is provided in classroom lectures. One of the main differences between learning from texts and learning from lectures is that in lectures, the teacher controls the pace. You usually do not have the ability to pause the teacher, go back, or slow down, like you do when reading or learning independently. Because lectures are such a unique way to learn and such a crucial key to success, it is important to use effective strategies to maximize your attention during class time and your retention after lectures. Whether your teacher stands behind a podium and reads off of a PowerPoint or leads a class discussion, try some of these effective strategies to ensure you get the most out of lecture-based learning.

Before class

Read assignments and do problems before class, not after. Don't be fooled by the common myth that it's not necessary to read before class if your teacher goes over the material in class. Reading the material first primes your short-term memory such that the information you learn in lecture is easier to remember because a) it's connecting to something you already know and b) repetition is often important for effective learning. By reading before class, you can make better connections between the text and the lecture, better identify the main ideas in the lecture, and already have background on the information presented in class.

Review your notes from the previous class. Taking just five to ten minutes to do this will refresh your memory and provide a foundation for new material.

List questions you have prior to class. These could be questions from the previous class or from the reading. Listen for answers during the lecture and ask questions if necessary.

During class

Situate yourself for success. If it helps, sit near the front of the class to stay engaged. Put away your laptop and/or close your internet browser so that you're not digitally distracted. Multitasking simply doesn't work, and it will keep you from getting the most from your lecture.

Take good notes. It's important to take good notes during class to have a solid resource to use to study for exams and to help yourself stay engaged during lecture. If you feel you are missing information, ask your teacher to post notes on Google Classroom or ask a classmate. Here are a few quick tips:

- Organize your notes so that you can easily and quickly go back and find information in the future.
- Focus on the main concepts and facts instead of trying to record everything.
- Abbreviate, paraphrase, and use bullet points to stay concise and save time.
- Record questions or areas of confusion to investigate after class.
- Pick a style that works for you and be consistent.
- Choose a method: handwritten, digital, or digital pen? There are benefits and drawbacks to each of these, so carefully consider which one works best for you.

Stay focused. If you lose focus or feel lost during part of the lecture, indicate in your notes where this occurs with a symbol (such as a star or question mark). This will help you know where you need to follow-up and get help later.

Actively listen. Your teacher may give verbal and nonverbal clues that information is important. Be on the lookout for definitions, examples, lists, superlatives (“most important,” “best,” “significant”), repetition, and voice or volume change. Make note of important information such as test dates, homework assignments, or study suggestions.

After class

Test yourself. Ask yourself or a classmate questions about the class lecture and then try to answer them in your own words. Research shows that students who engage their brains in asking and answering questions outperform those who simply reviewed their notes. Self-questioning is an active strategy that allows you to determine what’s important during lecture and think about the information deeper and in different ways. Create higher-order thinking questions to push your brain to deeper thinking.

Summarize. Go over the main points of the lecture in your own words. Explain what you learned and the main concepts to a classmate.

Revisit your notes. Soon after class is a good time to fill in any gaps you may have missed during class or to write down anything you didn’t get to in class. Investigate and answer any lingering questions or areas of confusion from the lecture. Reach out to your teacher or a classmate or attend tutoring if you need more explanation or help.

Create a study guide. Write a new set of notes that includes key points from the reading. Start by listing main concepts from both lecture and reading, and then fill in supporting details. Underline important vocabulary and concepts. Look for and note relationships between ideas.

Works consulted

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