



If you have ever found that you can't seem to stay focused during lectures, and are at a loss as to what material you ought to be including in your notes, then this workshop is for you. Welcome to "Active Listening & Note taking". Lets begin.

THE L.I.S.T.E.N METHOD

- ◉ LEAD
- ◉ IDEAS
- ◉ SIGNALS
- ◉ TAKE YOUR TIME
- ◉ EFFECTIVE LISTENING
- ◉ NOTES

The method we will discuss in this workshop is called “LISTEN”. By helping you to better understand your current habits, as well as helping you to become familiar with new strategies for improving your overall listening and note taking skills you will hopefully find yourself more able to focus in class, and better able to determine what information you should be writing down in your notes.

LEAD

- ◉ Be prepared for lectures
- ◉ Review previous lecture material
- ◉ Ensure that you have read text chapters prior to class
- ◉ Develop several well-thought-out questions
- ◉ You should be able to anticipate the topics that will be discussed in your upcoming lectures

The idea behind Leading is that you are so prepared for any given lecture that you can, with relative ease, determine what topics will be covered in a class.

This may seem tricky, but if you follow these steps, you should find yourself becoming something of a mind reader when it comes to lecture topics.

First of all, review of previous lecture material is essential. Not only will a brief review of the notes from the last weeks lectures boost your memory of that material, it will save you from re-writing all of the information that is reviewed in the upcoming lecture—you will be able to remember what you have and have not already recorded.

In addition, it is essential to read (or at the very least preview) the relevant textbook chapters prior to going to lectures. As with reviewing your notes, this will allow you to minimize the amount of unnecessary note taking, and focus on the discussion at hand. Pre-reading will also help you to gain an understanding of the topics that are being discussed—it can be easier to grapple with challenging concepts when you are reading a text on your own time than it may be while trying to keep up with brand new ideas in a fast-paced lecture. For more information on getting the most out of your textbook readings, refer to our online workshop entitled Active reading and Note taking.

In addition, take some time prior to your lecture to write out several questions that you have about the material to be discussed. Engaging yourself in the discussion by asking questions is one way to help keep yourself engaged in the lecture. Even if you don't have a chance to ask all of your questions, by seeking out answers from what is being said will also help you to focus.

IDEAS

- ◉ Focus on the central concepts being presented in the lecture
- ◉ Typically there are 2 or 3 main ideas
- ◉ Do not waste all of your time and energy writing down everything that is said

Since you will now have additional time to focus on what is being said (as you've read your chapters, and do not need to write down everything that your professor is saying), focus in on pinpointing the main ideas that your professor is trying to get across in the lecture—there will typically be 2 or 3.

Often, there will be a lot of filler material in and around these several main concepts, so remember—don't write down each and every thing that is said....try and focus in on what is really important.

SIGNALS

- ◉ Professors often give signals about what they consider important in a lecture—pay attention to their body language
- ◉ What is being written on the board?
- ◉ Listen to speech patterns

A significant part of good listening skills involves reading body language and speech intonation, and developing these skills can be helpful in learning what your professor deems to be important in a lecture.

Some things to focus on are more obvious—what is your professor writing down on the board? What points made it onto a supplemental overhead or handout? If your professor writes something down during your lecture, it is likely quite important.

The way your professor speaks will also offer clues about where to focus your attention. Listen for phrases indicating importance—often professors will come right out and tell you that the next thing they say will be very important.

If they offer an example of a concept this will also be something important to pay close attention to.

As well, if your professor returns to a point or an example several times throughout the course of the lecture, or spends a relatively long period of time on one topic, you can be certain that you'll need to know that information in the future.

TIME

- ◉ Take time to decide what you'll write into your notes—don't write everything down
- ◉ Record key words in case you miss something and need a reminder later on
- ◉ Leave space to add information in at the end
- ◉ Use extra time to write down questions you have about the material—ask these questions for clarification later, or seek answers from your text book

It may feel like you have lots and lots of extra time when you're sitting in your lectures. This is because our brains can think much faster than your professor can speak, so our thoughts tend to wander as the speaker catches up.

This lag time gives you the opportunity to process what is being said and make a decision about whether or not it is important enough to your understanding to be written into your notes.

You don't necessarily have to try and write down the important points verbatim either—ensure that you are managing to record key words or names to act as a memory aid later if you need to supplement your notes with information from your text book.

To this end, ensure that you're leaving some space in between your points—this way you won't have to try and cram extra information into the margin.

Finally, take time to briefly write down any questions that you have about the material so that you can clarify your understanding long before it comes time to prepare for exams. It is important to keep in mind that you want to be critically engaged with the material you're learning at all times.

EFFECTIVE LISTENING

- ◉ Active listening is effective listening—stay focused!
- ◉ Ask, or write down, questions that you have about the material
- ◉ Also, question the material that is being presented to you—interpret it in new ways
- ◉ Effective listening is facilitated by your environment—pick a good spot in the room

It can be difficult to stay focused during lectures, but by engaging in the active listening process that you're learning here you can help your self to stay focused.

When you are in your lectures, take time to write down, or ask any questions that you have about the material. Make sure you make note of the material that you're finding confusing, so that you can clarify any questions you have by referring to your text book, or discussing material with your classmates or professor. Don't forget to leave some space in your study notes to add in any new information.

The key to active listening is engaging with the material as you're learning it. Our minds can process thoughts faster than they can be spoken, so that's why your mind wanders during lectures. Use this time to question the material that you're learning. How does it fit with the material that you've learned earlier?

Finally, effective listening is facilitated by your environment, so make sure you pick a good spot in the room. Try to sit near the front of the room, and towards the centre. This will ensure that you have a clear view of the professor, as well as any visual cues such as the whiteboard or powerpoints that your professor is using as an aid. You'll also be able to hear better if you're sitting closer to the front of the room, and you'll be less likely to let your mind wander since you'll be within clear view of your professor.

NOTES

- ◉ Include diagrams and flowcharts
- ◉ Leave lots of space
- ◉ Highlight, underline, colour code, number
- ◉ Identify trouble spots

- ◉ The Cornell Method:
 - On one sheet of paper, draw a line down the paper creating a 2 inch margin on the left side
 - In this new margin, record key words, formulas, names
 - On the right side, make notes as you usually would
 - Option of a summary section

Now that you've learned how to listen more effectively, we'll spend some time working to improve your specific note taking skills.

In general, you want to ensure that you are leaving yourself plenty of space in your notes, so you have room to add information in at a later time.

You also want to, as mentioned earlier, record questions you have about the material somewhere that you can return to later.

Keep your notes organized by using a colour coding system that works for you, or by highlighting and underlining important information.

As well, to make your notes visually stimulating (which can assist you with recall), try and include diagrams, flowcharts, and pictures wherever possible.

One particularly useful method of note taking is the Cornell method. In this method, you create for yourself a study aid that will come in handy as you are preparing for exams. On a sheet of paper, draw a vertical line a couple of inches in from the left edge of the paper, creating a wide margin. In this space, record key words, formulas, names and dates. This section should only contain brief headings that can act as a memory cue later on.

In the larger right hand side of the page you will record the explanation or definition that goes along with your key word.

When it comes time to study, simply cover the right side of the page, and go through the margin defining the key words.

You also have the option of drawing a horizontal line at the bottom of your last page, leaving a space of perhaps a third of the page. If you choose to do so, in this section summarize your notes for the day in a few sentences. The ability to condense information in a useful way is often a sign of understanding.

PRACTISE

- ◉ Active listening is a challenging technique that takes some practise.
- ◉ In order to make the most of the information here, it is essential that you continually practise new skills
- ◉ Changing formed habits is not easy, so don't be discouraged if it seems challenging at first—don't give up!

It is not easy to simply start using new study strategies, and it takes time and practise to develop new habits. At first, new study techniques may seem tedious, and you may feel like the time you're spending that task could be put to better use. Rest assured that it takes time to develop all new habits, and after some time you'll find it becomes easier and less of a burden with each passing week.

Don't give up!

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

- ◉ For even more help with improving your time management skills, or for advice on other ways to improve your study habits, visit our website:

www.wlu.ca/study

- ◉ Visit the Study Skills office: Room 117, Macdonald House Residence, first floor
- ◉ Call to book an appointment: 519.884.0710 ext. 2222

For more assistance, visit our website, stop by the Study Skills Office, or call to book an appointment—you'll be glad you did!