

## Strategies for Listening and Taking Notes For International Students

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First, identify what you find challenging about listening and taking notes. Is it the listening and comprehension aspect? Being able to write down information quickly enough? Both? Knowing what to write down? Or is something else about the process challenging?

Identifying what your particular challenges are will also help you figure out what skills and strategies to practice so as to improve your listening and note-taking skills.

### Effective Listening

What strategies do you already use to be an active listener?

When you listen with the goal of understanding a lecture or paper, pay attention to the structure of the talk.

Listen for:

- Thesis
- Support
- Argumentation Strategy
- Competing Positions

Ask for the speaker to clarify parts you do not understand

Pay attention to the cues the speaker gives. These often help signal the points the speaker finds most important.

These cues can be Verbal or Non-Verbal.

Verbal cues include:

- Transitions
- Focus Words
- Changes in Tone, Rate, or Volume
- Repetition of Ideas

Non-Verbal cues include:

- Use of Body Language
- Facial Expressions
- Writing on the Board

Transitions and Focus Words and Phrases are used to guide the listener through the lecture, and call attention to the most important points. [See the link to Transitional Phrases \(From Purdue OWL\) in the blog post.](#)

Practice Listening! Online resources include TED talks, NPR (National Public Radio) programs, the news, and listening exercises specifically developed for ESL students.

<http://www.esl-lab.com/>

<http://www.manythings.org/e/listening.html>

<http://www.uefap.com/listen/listfram.htm>

Pick a subject that interests you, and listen to a talk. As you do so, focus on two questions:

What is the main point of this lecture or program?

What are some supporting facts the speaker gives?

### **Effective Note-Taking**

Taking good notes involves work Before, During, and After Class.

Before Class:

Always do the assigned reading, as fully as possible

Taking notes may be helpful

Note the central thesis or idea

Write down new words and definitions

Situate this material within what has been covered in class so far

Being familiar with the material and knowing what to expect from a lecture will help you comprehend it.

What strategies do you already use to take good notes in class?

During class:

Sit near the professor, if possible

Bring assigned readings, handouts, and notes

Use active listening skills

Consider if you want to use a laptop or write by hand; a laptop may help you take down more information more quickly, but writing by hand usually helps people retain information better since they have to filter it for the most important points

It is a good idea to take notes in the language the class is being held in, but you can also use your native language

You can find lists of helpful abbreviations online; also, consider what words you would typically use in your note-taking, and create your own inspired abbreviations

Think About What to Write Down

Listen most carefully at the beginning, to discern an outline for the lecture

Note the main ideas and argument of the speaker

Consider how the lecture connects to other materials you have read, and especially note material that appears in both sources. Is the presentation of this material the same, or different?

Try to put the ideas into your own words

#### Taking Notes

- Don't write in complete sentences
  - Focus on ideas and details
  - Write in outlines, not paragraphs
- Focus on writing down what you don't already know
  - Note unfamiliar words and terms
  - Add to notes taken on readings
- Leave lots of white space so as to add notes later
- If you get behind, don't get flustered and stop; just leave a blank and go back to taking notes on the rest of the lecture

#### Strategies for Note-taking: After Class

- Test your comprehension. Consider and write down:
  - What were the main points of the lecture?
  - How does it relate to course themes and topics?
- Add to your knowledge
  - Look up new vocabulary
  - Compare lectures with outside reading

#### Fill in the Gaps

- It is normal to miss some points during class
- Work with your classmates—
  - Exchange notes
  - Form study sessions, and talk through the lectures and readings
- Ask questions of your professor

#### Further Listening Practice:

- TED talks
- NPR
- Campus Lectures
- News

#### Resources for ESL listening exercises:

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