Lecture Preparation

Aim of this factsheet

To highlight the importance of preparing for lectures, providing an outline of key skills and good practice.

Introduction

In order to make sense of the new information and concepts discussed in lectures, preparation is essential. It will not be possible for you to simply absorb all of the information delivered within a lecture, and nor will lectures provide everything you will need to know about your subject. It is important that you are able to understand the context of a lecture, and that you engage with the content by making active notes to refer to later in your studies (and jotting down any questions, critical points or issues that you wish to look into after the lecture). To be able to do this effectively, lecture preparation is key.

How will preparation help?

Preparation will:

- aid your understanding of the subject area
- improve your memory of the topic
- allow you to connect ideas and develop your own mental map of the information
- help you to retrieve the information at a later date
- support you in thinking more deeply about the subject
- enhance your understanding of how this specific information will be useful for your assignments

Preparing for classes is therefore time well spent. It will ensure that you learn more when in the session, and your note taking will be more effective and meaningful. Through preparation you can learn new terminology and ideas in advance of lectures; this will enable you to pick up on keywords more easily and better understand the main arguments being explored, and will focus your listening skills. You will therefore be able to make more sense of the information and concepts explained in the lecture and how they relate to your assignments.

Skills required in lectures

Price and Maier (2007, p. 106) outline the following skills needed to get the most out of lectures:

1. Listening
2. Concentration
3. Summarising
4. Note taking
5. Organisation (on paper and in your thinking)
6. Critical thinking
7. Multi-tasking (to do many of the above at the same time and speed)

You may already possess some of these skills, but others you will need to develop over a period of time. The advice in this factsheet can help you with this, as can our resources on Note taking, Paraphrasing, Critical Thinking and other areas of study skills.

Different types of lectures

Consider the function of a lecture in order to get the most out of it and frame your thinking around it. Is it an introductory lecture, designed to familiarise you with a new module or new concepts? Will it focus on a particular aspect of this module in detail? Where does it fit in? Lectures are designed to develop your knowledge and skills as you move towards assessments. Some may even contain crucial discussion of your assignment brief and the requirements for a successful piece of work.

Do not make a habit of missing lectures

Accessing presentation slides can never replace face-to-face delivery of a lecture. If you miss a lecture you are missing:

- the detail of the lecture;
- the asides, the emphasis the lecturer places on different aspects of the subject and their tone of voice and body language, all of which will strengthen your understanding of the topic;
- any questions which are raised (and answered) in the lecture.

How should you prepare for lectures?

Use your module handbooks, which can help in the following ways:

1. Provide an overview of the subject.
2. Give an idea about what you should expect in each lecture.
3. Inform you about the proposed series of lectures, providing a framework that can help you to make links between them.
4. Provide glossaries of new terminology. You can use this to improve your listening skills (by giving you key terms to listen out for) and support your understanding of new concepts.
5. Supply reading lists to help you to develop your understanding of the subject area in advance of the lecture.
6. Outline the assessment format and learning outcomes.

Make use of the resources available online:

1. Use the information available on Blackboard. Read notes and presentations in advance of lectures to develop a framework.
2. Perform an academic search on the internet and download any background information to help you to gain an understanding of the subject area of the lecture.
3. Search your library catalogue for relevant information. Make an appointment with your subject librarian if you would like advice on how to do this: http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/appointments.
There are key actions and activities that you can undertake in advance of lectures to put yourself in an excellent position:

| 1. | Read in advance of the lecture and create a list of possible questions about the subject area that you would like to be able to answer. This will help you to focus in the lecture, participate more critically and deepen your understanding of the topic. |
| 2. | Get your files and notes organised in advance. |
| 3. | Anticipate the framework or sub-headings that you will use in your notes so that you can more easily structure them as you go along. |

**Develop your skills**

Make sure you adopt an active listening approach. This means questioning, selecting and summarising the spoken information. This will help you to deal with new and challenging information more effectively. You will have a higher level of concentration as you will be adopting a critical approach towards the subject.

To help with this process, make connections with previous learning:

- Why has this information been included?
- How does this link with the rest of the topic or subject?
- Is this essential or exemplar information?
- How does this fit with the information I already know or have read?
- What point is the lecturer trying to make?
- How does this relate to my assessment(s)?

**Good practice in lectures**

It you take down the information below you may be able to refer to your lecture handouts in assignments, if this is appropriate for your course.

- The lecturer’s name (surname and initials)
- The lecture title
- Module code and module title
- Title of any notes distributed
- The teaching organisation, department, location and date

See RefZone (http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/refzone) for the correct referencing format.

**References**


**For an appointment or further advice:**

Click:  [http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/AcademicSkills](http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/AcademicSkills)

Call:  01785 353500

Email:  academicskills@staffs.ac.uk

Visit:  Skills Space, Thompson Library, Stoke / Blackheath Lane, Stafford / Shrewsbury Hospital

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