HOW TO TAKE NOTES

From lectures

There are three important steps to help you get the most out of your lectures:

Before class: Preparation-Notes

- Read, do a brief survey or scan of required readings before class
- Note important facts, formulas, ideas, dates, terminology, etc.
- Make note of any questions you might have that can be answered in class

During class: Lecture-Notes

- Sit near the lecturer to avoid distractions and be prepared to take neat, legible notes.
- Using one side of the page only, be sure to write the page number, date and course code on each sheet of notes.
- Listen for verbal cues. Voice inflection and key vocabulary will signal important words and material, material context, denote contrasts or indicate a conclusion.
- Watch for visual cues, paying close attention to slides, written materials on boards and postings, handouts, photocopies, etc.
- Active listening means listening to lecturer and noting important points only, not every word uttered. If you have questions during lecture, jot them down to be asked later in class. Highlight words or phrases you may not understand and use quotation marks around verbatim quotes you noted.
- In the last five minutes of class, the lecturer will often provide a brief recap of main points made.
- Audiorecording of the class is not a good idea! It's much too time-consuming to transcribe later. However, with the lecturer's permission, audiorecording may be used if you have a physical or learning disability, need to review to fill in gaps in lecture notes, or to listen to the session again later while commuting or jogging.
- You may find it beneficial to develop your own shorthand symbols for your notes.

After class: Summary-Notes

- It's important and time-saving, either after class or on the same day, to prepare summary notes from your preparation and lecture notes, while the information is easy to recall. The summary notes are your study notes for later!
- If you're confused or still have questions from this class, consult readings, classmates, the T.A. or lecturer for answers and clarification as soon as possible.
- Actively review your summary notes periodically to stay familiar with the material.
- Stay organized! Keep all notes, summaries, handouts, etc. in separate three-ring binders for each course.
From critical reading

The **SQ4R system** has been an effective method used for reading textbooks and articles. This method may seem time-consuming compared to simply reading, however the long-term benefit is that you are reading, taking notes and studying for exams in a single process.

**SQ4R** = Survey, Question, Read, Respond, Recall, Review

**Survey**

It should take no more than 10 minutes to survey required readings before lectures to become familiar with names, formulae, vocabulary, important issues, etc.

- Review the title, subtitles, illustrations, diagrams, graphs, charts, etc.
- Read the summary or abstract, observing key words, questions or problem sets.

**Question**

From your survey, formulate questions in your mind to help with concentration, retention and identifying important issues when active reading.

- The easiest way to do this is by turning all the subheadings into questions. For example, the subheading might read, “The benefits of talking about trauma” which you can turn into the question “What are the benefits of talking about trauma?”

**Read**

Read the text section-by-section, actively looking for the answers to your questions.

- Highlight or underline your answers and make a note or short question in the margin.

**Respond**

Think about what you’re reading and learning, and respond actively to your reading.

- Take notes on any further questions you have, any thoughts or observations from the reading or any connections to previous knowledge acquired.

**Recall**

Can you answer the questions formed from this section?

- Before reading next section, review notes and be able to answer questions posed.

**Review**

To end the study session using the **SQ4R Method**, take a five-minute break, then review the reading notes and questions you made in each section. Take 10 minutes to repeat the recall process.

From research reading

Effective note-taking is key to writing well-focused and coherently argued papers when faced with a wealth of information. Good research note-taking includes three main principles:

**Know what kind of ideas you need to record**

- Before starting your research, know what the assignment is asking you to do, what the topic consists of and your approach to the topic.
- Be aware of the commonly known facts about the topic as well as other existing opinions and ranges of thought.
- Develop a preliminary list of subheadings as a possible guide for notes.
- Formulate your research question on a component of this topic that interests you.
- Begin your research reading, now looking for specific facts, theories and opinions.

**Don’t write down too much**

- Your essay must be an expression of your own thinking! Invest your research time in understanding your sources and integrating them into your own thinking.
- Copy down exact words only when ideas are memorably phrased and when you might use them as actual quotations.
- Come across some good ideas? Compress these in your own words, or jot them down as labels or headings to expand upon later. Paraphrasing word-by-word is a waste of time!
- Use own words on sticky notes or in the margins – don’t depend only on highlighting.
Label your notes immediately!

- Take notes in a way that allows for later use, i.e. note cards, sheets of paper, etc.
- Immediately record bibliographic information in a master list or computer file for later identification of the note.
- Keep a format guide handy to get details right from the start.
- Keep notes separate and focused for different topics to allow for easier grouping and synthesizing of ideas later.
- Leave lots of space in your notes to allow for additional information, comments or questions that may come up later in your research.

_Further writing strategies can be found at:_
[writing.utoronto.ca](http://writing.utoronto.ca).

Visit [asc.utoronto.ca](http://asc.utoronto.ca) for more information on our programs, workshops/events, peer support and how to make an appointment.