General Note-Taking Tips

What to Write

Listen for cue words that show contrast, repetition, summary and cause and effect. Always think about what you write down as this will help you to logically organize the relationships between ideas and more deeply understand the content.

Access Background Knowledge

Knowing the major components of the topic will make it easier to determine what is important to note during the lecture and how to organize the relationships between the ideas. With this background knowledge, you can also create a purpose for the lecture, such as looking to expand or clarify a particular topic. To gain background knowledge,

- Do the readings before class
- Review the previous lecture's notes
- Anticipate the direction of the topic

Be on Time and Stay until the End

In the first few minutes of class, the professor will often set the direction for the entire lecture and tend to class business, such as announcing a date change for the exam. In the last few minutes, the professor may give important concluding remarks that may be critical to the significance of the topic.

If you miss the beginning or the end, ask a peer what information was given or reach out to the professor.

Date and Number your Notes

Dating each lecture and numbering the pages within each day's lecture can help you to organize your notes and to find any missing notes easily.

View Notes Simultaneously

If taking notes by hand, write on only one side of the paper as this allows you to lay out all of your notes at one time. This can help you make connections between information that you otherwise may not have seen without viewing all the information simultaneously.

If taking notes by laptop, set up your document so that you can view multiple pages of notes at once.

Develop Some Shorthand

People speak at about 120 words/minute whilst only writing by hand at 25 words/minute or typing at 40-60 words/minute. Using shorthand will save valuable time for more effective note taking. For example, introduction = intro; because = bc. On a laptop, you can set up autocorrect options to automatically replace the shorthand with the full word.