



Listening and note-taking

To do well in your courses, you must attend or watch lectures online and understand the content. To do this it is important to develop active listening and effective note-taking skills.

Active listening in lectures

Active listening during lectures enables you to engage with the content and to understand, remember and recall what you have heard. Research has shown some factors that affect listening in lectures are:

- the level of students' background knowledge
- the speed of lecturers' delivery or their accents
- the students' ability to recognise lecture 'signposts'
- the amount of new vocabulary/technical words (Flowerdew & Miller 2005)

1. If a lecture topic is new to you:

- find out the topic and try to guess what will be covered
- access the lecture outlines from your course site and read them
- note any new words or terms and highlight these
 - check the meaning so you understand the word
 - check pronunciation so you recognise the word if you hear it

2. If you find that lecturers speak too quickly or their accents are unfamiliar:

- listen to the lectures again, or for face to face lectures, ask permission from the lecturer to tape the lecture if they are not automatically recorded. Listening to lectures again helps you become more familiar with your lecturer's accent and also reinforces content;
- prepare for new vocabulary through reading before the lecture as this will help you to recognise the words when they are spoken, and
- to develop your listening skills, practice listening to lectures in a variety of accents

3. If you find it difficult to follow and understand the lecture's content:

a) Learn to identify the structure of the lecture.

Lectures usually have a structure made up of three parts:

- Introduction – what the lecture is about
- Body – key points and detailed information
- Conclusion – summary

b) Focus your listening on how lecturers use speaking patterns especially ‘signpost’ language in a lecture.

Verbal signposts include:

- “To begin ...” , “First of all ...” “The first point I want to make is ...”
- “However...” “In contrast ...” “Another point is ...” “For example...”
- “There are three factors ...”, “There are several issues...”
- “To summarise ...”, “In conclusion ...”, “ Well ...”

Lecturers also signal with:

- pauses – these often indicate changes of topic
- speed – changes to slower speech usually emphasise significant points
- volume – changes to louder volume usually emphasise significant points
- intonation – voices often lower at the end of a sentence/idea

Also pay attention to non-verbal signposts, such as gestures – e.g. pointing out the most significant point on a slide.

4. If you find that lectures have a lot of new vocabulary and technical words:

- before lectures skim read the lecture outline and relevant readings
- make your own list of words for each course as you hear them
- ask other students online or face to face how to pronounce new words after the lecture

Effective note-taking in lectures

It is easier to make effective notes if you have done some preparation on the topic before the lecture so you know what to expect. The method of note-taking you choose really depends on your personal style and sometimes on the discipline area. Some methods are:

- key words
- short hand
- notes on a power point handout
- dot points with examples
- diagrams and tables
- mind maps
- flow charts

Try and spend some time after the lecture tidying up your notes so that you can understand them when you refer to them again. For exam revision, convert your lecture notes into a series of prompts on flash cards.

References

Flowerdew, J & Miller, L 2005, *Second language listening : theory and practice*, Cambridge University Press, New York.