**Take Note**

**"How to take notes for a student with a Disability"**

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**People who decide to become a notetaker for a student with a disability should:**

* **Take clear and comprehensive notes.**
* **Be aware of the particular needs of the student.**
* **Communicate appropriately.**

**Introduction**

As learning centres, universities use a variety of techniques in the dissemination of information to students. Depending on the course, the delivery of content can take many forms: tutorials, fieldwork, seminars, workshops and lectures. No matter what the mode of delivery, students are normally required to take notes. These notes are used for assignments and preparing for exams.

You may wonder why you need to take a good set of notes. Researchers have found that up to 80% of what we learn is forgotten within 24 hours. Taking a good set of notes is therefore critical for revising and for effective learning. Notes should be effective when read months later.

Because of disability some students are unable to take adequate notes and require trained notetakers.

Support services such as notetaking are essential in accommodating and providing equal opportunity for students with disabilities. Without notetakers many students would have great difficulty continuing their studies and pursuing a chosen career. Notetaking is now one of the most important services provided to students with disabilities to give access to information at university.

**Why Some Students Need a Notetaker**

Notes are required by some students with the following disabilities and medical conditions:

* Hearing Impairment
* Vision Impairment
* Specific Learning Disabilities
* Arthritis
* Quadriplegia
* Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)
* Muscular Dystrophy
* Multiple Sclerosis
* Amputation
* Cerebral Palsy
* Head Injuries
* Conditions where there may be episodic absences:
  + Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)
  + AIDS
  + Chronic Asthma.

Notetakers assist these students by attending lectures and tutorials and taking written notes for them.

**Who are notetakers?**

A notetaker can be a peer, that is, a student from the same lecture group as the student requiring the notes, or a paid notetaker from outside the class who has the appropriate skills and background.

**Who is suitable to become a notetaker for a student with a disability?**

A fellow student or person who has the following characteristics:

* legible writing
* clear and comprehensive notetaking skills
* sensitivity to the needs of people with disabilities
* punctuality and reliability
* confidence in approaching lecturers
* willingness to accept direction and guidance
* willingness to build a working relationship
* knowledge of the subject (in some cases).

**Attitude and Communication**

"Everyone’s uncomfortable at first until they get to know you..." said George, a university student who has quadriplegia.

People often feel uncomfortable or unsure of themselves when meeting people they perceive to be different from themselves, be it race, gender, age, sexual preference, or because of disability.

Largely this is due to a lack of knowledge and understanding, which in itself can turn to fear or perhaps a feeling of guilt.

Unfortunately, people with disabilities have traditionally been seen as people to be pitied or protected.

The reality is that people with disabilities have the same range of strengths and weaknesses as other human beings and simply wish to be treated as individuals. A person’s disability is only a part of his or her life, not who he or she is.

**Using Appropriate Language**

Avoid terms that emphasise limitation, when talking to or about a person with a disability.

Also avoid negative terms such as "victim" or "sufferer" when describing a person with a disability, as these suggest powerlessness. Here are some Do's and Don'ts:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **USE** | **DON’T USE** |
| people with disabilities | the disabled |
| person with a disability | handicapped person |
| people who are deaf (or hearing impaired) | the deaf, the deaf and dumb |
| people with vision impairment | the vision impaired |
| person with cerebral palsy, quadriplegia, paraplegia | cripple, victim, sufferer |
| person who uses a wheelchair | confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound |
| person with AIDS | AIDS sufferer, victim of AIDS |
| person who has had polio | polio victim |

**Communicating with a person who is deaf**

The effects of hearing loss on communication will depend on the following factors:

* Extent of hearing loss - mild to profound
* Type of hearing loss (high or low frequencies)
* Time of hearing loss - prenatal, prelingual, preschool, adolescent, adult.

Hearing impairment can affect a person’s speech. A deaf person’s speech may be different in volume, pitch and inflection and he/she may speak more slowly or have a less extensive vocabulary.

People who are deaf may use different communication modes:

* Auslan (Australian sign language), signed English, cued speech, speech
* Finger spelling and/or lip reading
* Hearing aids, FM systems, and hearing loops.

Communicating with a person who does not hear well does not have to be difficult. It is useful to remember the following:

* The person is trying to make sense of an incomplete puzzle and "hears whenever he/she can".
* It is best to avoid places with background noise when meeting people with hearing loss, as hearing aids amplify all frequencies.
* Where the method of communication is lip reading, sit where the person can see your face clearly.
* Avoid covering your mouth with your hands and/or turning away while talking.

**Key Steps in Taking Notes**

The aim is to get the best set of notes for yourself (if you are enrolled in the subject) and the student who requires them. Individuals with disabilities will differ in their needs and the style of notes they prefer. For example, a student with profound hearing loss will generally require more detailed notes and may benefit from the use of illustrations. It is important to record changes in class locations, or times, for students with hearing impairment.

Ask the student who is receiving your notes what format he/she would like and check regularly with the student to see if they are suitable. Ask the student whether he/she wants you to sit next to them.

To obtain the best set of notes the following steps and techniques should be applied.

**Before a lecture**

* Obtain a syllabus and the lecture structure to identify the direction of the lecture.
* Pre-read relevant chapters and note key terms.
* Revise notes of previous lecture.

Time spent doing these three activities before a lecture will mentally warm you up and tune you in so that you are able to select the relevant from the not so relevant points. This way your notes will be concise, clear and comprehensive.

**During a lecture**

Listen actively by doing the following:

* Avoid distractions and sit near the front where you can maximise hearing and viewing.
* Try and anticipate what will happen next in the lecture.
* Focus on the content and what is important.
* Be alert to variations in the lecturer’s style or organisation of the lecture.

Be aware that your thinking speed considerably exceeds the lecturer’s speaking speed. Think ahead, anticipate, analyse, evaluate and concentrate. Be wary of sitting back and resting. Regard lectures and tutorials as opportunities to exercise your attentive and creative skills.

**After a lecture**

* Get any missing points from a classmate or from the lecturer.
* Briefly read over notes and clarify, amplify, correct and organise them if necessary.
* Promptly provide notes to the student requiring them. To learn effectively a student needs to revise his/her notes as soon as possible.

**Basic Points on Notetaking**

**Punctuality**

It’s important that you attend each class and arrive on time. Often important procedural information is given during the first 5 to 10 minutes of the class. If you can’t be on time or attend a class, let your student know.

**Feedback**

Clear and continual communication between notetaker and student is vital. The notes should be as useful as possible for the student so encourage him/her to give you constant feedback.

Some lecturers may also wish to be involved in this process. Check with them as to the quality of your notes to make sure you are recording the appropriate material.

**Labelling notes**

Title notes with subject name and lecturer. It is also helpful to number and date each page. This helps the student when filing his/her notes and checking that they have all notes when the time comes for review.

|  |
| --- |
| ***(1) 13.8.94 Psychology 1 S Boyd***  ***Child Development*** |

**Writing legibly**

Writing legibly is a major concern when notetaking for another student. Your writing may be perfectly legible to you but totally unreadable to someone else. ***Check your writing with the student***. Important words can be PRINTED to ensure they are understood.

**Being unbiased**

Most of us have difficulty keeping our personal biases out of our notes. You should remember that you are not just taking notes for yourself but for someone else. You need to be as unbiased as possible with the lecturer, the course content and the student. If you disagree with something the lecturer has said in class, talk to him/her in private about it. Don’t interject your opinions into the notes.

If the student constantly complains about the course, the lecturer, the tests, then be careful to avoid feeding the student’s negativism.

**Spelling**

The correct spelling of words, especially technical terms, may be crucial for a student’s success in a course. If a difficult term is misspelt regularly, the student may learn the incorrect spelling . When you are unsure of the spelling of a word, write sp? Above the word and correct it later.

|  |
| --- |
| **(1) 3 October Political science African Politics P Griffiths**  **Politics of Gana (sp?)**  Gana (sp?) strongly influenced by its neighbour – Dahome- in political system.  Gana (sp?) changed political system in 1973 after director Ryembo……. |

**Leaving blanks**

If the lecturer makes a noteworthy point and you miss it, leave a space in your notes indicated by dots.

You know then where the gaps are. The lecturer may repeat these points later or you can get them after the lecture.

|  |
| --- |
| (4)  there are three main concerns to this theory:   1. Isolation 2. Knowledge 3. ……………   Jones published this theory in the ‘London Medical News’, June……… |

**Stationery**

Standard size A4 paper is best to use when notetaking. Writing only on one side makes the notes easier to read and to photocopy. Black pens are also best for photocopying. If you are using carbonised notepads you need a ball point rather than a felt pen.

**Determine your role in class**

If you are notetaking and are not an enrolled member of the class, you should inform the lecturer as soon as possible. Ask the lecturer if he/she would like you to join in the general activities of the class, especially in terms of asking and answering questions. If you are not enrolled in that subject then generally you should be an unobtrusive member of the class.

**Notetaking Techniques**

**Using white space effectively**

Notetaking is not just a matter of filling up line after line, recording everything the lecturer says. You should concentrate on getting the central ideas and concepts and recording them in a manageable format.

Space out the main ideas by skipping a line or two or dividing the page into columns. By leaving space at the top, side/s and bottom of the page and between chunks of information, the notes are easier to learn from and process later.

The white space can be used to add:

* content during a lecture when a speaker jumps backward and forwards
* extra notes when a student reviews the notes for exams
* supplementary notes, word meanings or examples for the student
* references.

|  |
| --- |
| (5)  **Performance**   * Is our most manageable resource * Should be out central focus   (not heredity or environment)   * too much emphasis on one’s- Personality   + - School Attended   + - Employer   + - IQ * results from Burtt’s Study on Twins   + genetic   + discredited in 1973 |

**Structuring the information**

A common type of layout is one such as this, using letters, numbers and indenting. In this way, main headings, intermediate headings and points are easily identified.

You may also structure information by providing:

* an outline of the main points in the lecture
* a diagram using words and lines.

Sometimes due to the delivery of the lecture it may be necessary to mark headings and points of emphasis at the conclusion of the class.

|  |
| --- |
| A. (MAIN)   * 1. (intermediate)   a.(minor)   * 1. point   2. Point   b.(minor)   * 1. point   c.(minor)   * 1. point   2. point   3. point   B. (main)  (etc) |

**Emphasising key points**

Apart from the format there are many ways to emphasise key points from a lecture:

* underline important words and phrases
* asterisks\* can be used
* circling is often used to draw attention to an important point
* boxing is a common method for definitions
* LARGE or PRINTED letters can make points stand out
* as can highlighting

If you are photocopying your notes, be careful. Some highlighters will not show up on the copy and others may delete the highlighted text completely.

**Listening for cues of organisation**

Lecturers give many cues as to the structures and the relative importance of information as they talk. Listen for such cues as this helps in deciding the importance of information given. Here are some examples of such cues:

*‘Now this is a concept that you’ll need to understand before you can comprehend the other principles’* - main point

*‘Let me illustrate by’* - example

*‘As a consequence’* - results of ideas

*‘How do we know this’* - evidence

*‘This will be in the test’* - important point

*‘This term means’* - definition

*‘In overview, we will look at’* - summary

*‘Five characteristics which may be noted are’* - subsidiary points

As a note taker you should listen analytically and identify these points in a presentation:

a) main headings

b) intermediate headings

c) minor headings

d) points

e) examples

f) references

g) definitions

h) questions

i) answers

1. j) key points

Well presented lectures begin with an overview of what will be discussed or a review of past lectures, followed by the body of the lecture. In conclusion a summary is given and here you have the opportunity to check your notes. Approach the lecturer if anything is still unclear to you.

**Abbreviations**

While abbreviations can be of great assistance to the notetaker some students prefer not to have them in their notes at all. Some students with sensory impairment have never taken notes and can be unsure of even the most common abbreviations. Make certain that the student using your notes is comfortable and familiar with any abbreviations used. You may agree to devise some of your own abbreviations.

**Complete sentences**

It is usually best to write in complete sentences, when notetaking for sensory impaired students. However, point form can be used where appropriate, e.g. for a list of items or ideas. Use plain English and as few words as possible without changing the meaning of the sentence.

**Use examples**

When you take notes include examples. This is a help to you and your fellow student to better understand any point.

**Illustrate with diagrams and graphs**

Illustrations, graphs and diagrams can be used to explain a point, even though the lecturer may not have used one. The maximum use of visuals will generally help when working with students who are deaf.

**Clarification of terms**

The need to clarify vocabulary depends on the language skills of the student. For many deaf students who use signing, English is their second language so their vocabulary may be limited. If you need to define a word in your notes, the common methods are:

* providing a synonym in brackets after the word
* putting an asterisk beside the word and referring the student to another part of the page where you can give a sentence or two of definition.

**Glossary**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| N.B. | Note well, Important |
| p | Page |
| pp | pages |
| ch | chapter |
| i.e. | that is |
| etc. | and so on |
| vs | versus, as opposed to |
| viz | namely |
| eg | example |
| b/w | between |
| op sit | in the work quoted |
| ibid | in the same work |
| qv | for reference to this, see |
| # or no. | number |
| cf | compare |
| wrt | with respect to |
| c or + | with |
| w/o | without |
| def | definition |
| ref | reference |
| re | about |
| incl | including, inclusive |
| yr | year |
| para | paragraph |
| esp | especially |
| ex | exercise |
| sp | spelling |
| ff | following |
|  | male |
|  | father |
|  | female |
|  | mother |
| > | greater than |
| < | less than |
|  | change |
| + | add to, plus |
| - | take away, subtract |
|  | divide |
| x | times, multiply |
| & | and |
| @ | each |
|  | because |
|  | therefore |
| = | equals |
|  | does not equal |
|  | approximately |
|  | leads to, causes, direction |
|  | increases, elevate, high, much |
|  | decrease, descend, low, few |
|  | both ways, either ways |
| EEG | electrencephalograph |
| GNP | gross national product |

**Examples of personally devised abbreviations**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| RS | Right Side |
| LS | Left Side |
| Reln | relation |
| Relp | relationship |
| N/t | notetaker |
| Devl | developmental |
| Devt | development |

**Reworking notes**

It is not required to rewrite the notes. However, going back over the notes and reworking them can greatly increase their effectiveness. This may involve:

* clarifying terms and definitions in the white space
* elaborating with diagrams, examples and illustrations
* emphasising the main points and structure
* cross referencing with information and texts
* clearing up any ambiguities.

Improvements can be made during any pauses in the lecture or at the conclusion.

**All information**

As well as recording notes from the content of the lecture it is vitally important to the student that all organisational information is recorded. If a lecturer makes an announcement, gives information on examinations, textbooks or room changes note these down.

Often a lecturer makes a passing comment such as possible exam question. Comments such as these are very important to the student.

**Checklist: Guidelines for a Notetaker**

The rights and responsibilities of a notetaker are listed below.

**General points**

* Confidentiality is very important. You should not discuss the student for whom you take notes with other notetakers, the lecturer or students.
* If there are any problems with the notetaking or your relationship with the student, talk with the student first. If you cannot resolve them, then speak to the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities.
* Where possible, notes should be given to the student immediately following the lecture.
* Paper will be provided by the University.
* Where possible, the student is expected to inform you of possible absences. Ask the Coordinator what you should do if the student is absent for more than 3 lectures.
* Notetakers are not tutors and are not expected to give extensive explanations of material for which they have taken notes.

**Basic points**

* Be on time.
* Write legibly.
* Use black medium point biro pen.
* Use one side of A4 paper.
* Number, title and date each page.
* Use correct spelling.
* Leave ......... (dotted space), if information has been missed.
* Be unbiased.
* Get regular feedback from the student regarding your notes.
* Determine your role in class.

**Notetaking techniques**

* Use white space effectively.
* Listen for cues of organisation.
* Mark points of emphasis.
* Structure the information.
* Use plain English.
* Use complete sentences (unless the student has requested or agreed to an abbreviated form of notetaking).
* Use abbreviations and symbols.
* Use examples.
* Illustrate with diagrams and graphs.
* Clarify and define words.
* Indicate different speakers and include their comments.
* Rework the notes.

**Guidelines for a** **Student Receiving Notes**

Your role and hints for improving the notetaking service are listed below.

* It helps if you request notetaking assistance as soon as possible.
* You may approach and select a peer from your lecture group to be a notetaker or ask the Co-ordinator to make the arrangements.
* Attend each lecture for which you are receiving notes.
* Take some notes yourself, if you can.
* Meet your notetaker and obtain the notes regularly.
* Give your notetaker regular constructive feedback about the notes. Point out what helps and what changes would be helpful.
* Communicate any problems in the first instance to your notetaker. If it is not resolved, talk with your Coordinator for Students with Disabilities.
* Keep your notes organised.
* Read and review notes regularly.
* Ask the notetaker to clarify any information in your notes.
* Understand and distinguish the difference between the notetaking role and the tutoring role.
* Rework or add to your notes to help retain or understand concepts.
* Inform the notetaker and/or Coordinator for Students with Disabilities of your possible absences.
* If your notetaker is absent, you may need to be responsible for obtaining notes from another student.
* Do not expect automatic copies of notes when you have been absent.
* The notetaker should not be discussed with other students.
* If you are not satisfied with the notes you are receiving, and discussing the problem does not resolve it, you can request another notetaker from the Coordinator.

**Acknowledgements**

The video Take Note and these course notes were produced as a cooperative project by Macquarie University, the University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney and the University of Technology, Sydney. It was funded by a grant from the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). The coordinators for Students with Disabilities from the four universities assisted in the preparation of this book.

The video was produced by the Audio Visual Unit of the University of New South Wales.

This booklet has drawn upon some of the materials of Module Four: Note-taker Training of the Griffith University Centre for Deafness Studies and Research AccessAbility Kit on Disability Issues. We gratefully acknowledge the use of these materials authored by Michele Stephens of Griffith University, Queensland.

We also gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Dr Fred Orr, Acting Head of Counselling & Careers, the University of New South Wales, who has granted permission to use sections from his books, Study Skills for Successful Students and How to Pass Exams, (both published by Allen & Unwin).

We also acknowledge the use of materials derived from The Tutor/Notetaker - Providing Academic Support to Mainstreamed Deaf Students, written by Russell T Osguthorpe, 1980, The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf Inc., Washington D.C., USA.

 University of NSW  
ISBN 073340819-2

Extra Copies of course notes and video are available from:

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