General Note Taking Summary Tips

Effective note taking takes practice, and even the very best students may lose track in a discussion or become confused about the objectives in a lesson. Don't become discouraged. Remember that the more you think about the lecture-- i.e., listen actively and take good notes-- the more you will understand. It is what you actually do with the ideas presented in class--or those generated in your thoughts through listening, reading and thinking--that are critical to your understanding and retaining the material.

The purposes of good note taking are to:

- encourage you to listen carefully and critically to what is being communicated
- increase comprehension and retention
- help you create a concise and complete outline of important topics, subtopics, and supporting ideas.
- clarify ideas and embellish the material presented

One aspect of preparation is setting up a notebook:

- Keep a separate notebook or a separate section of a notebook for each course. This will help you stay organized and avoid misplacing your notes.
- If the course requires different types of notes (i.e. lecture notes, notes on outside readings, lab notes, computation notes) arrange them on opposite pages for cross-reference purposes.
- Notes for each lecture should begin on a new page, with the date and page number.

Tips for structuring and maintaining good, accurate notes:

- Make your notes brief: use a key phrase for a sentence or a word to represent a phrase.
- Abbr.(abbreviate!) whenever possible.
- Put notes into your own words.
- Formulas, definitions and specific facts demand exact wording.
- Number or indent items to distinguish between major and minor points.
- Develop questions for your friends or instructor to help clarify information or concepts.
- If you miss something completely, leave a blank space and locate the information later.
- Develop a coding system or scheme to mark your notes. For example: a ? would stand for "not understood; an * would mark important points.
- A good place to locate your coding scheme is in the margin of the notebook.

Remember, this is your education. To get the most out of it, you will want to ask questions. Prepare a list of questions prior to class, especially on concepts you did not fully understand. Also, note concepts during the lecture that you do not understand and about which you want to ask questions. If you continue to feel that you don't understand, ask a classmate, make an appointment with your instructor, or visit the teaching and learning center to get help!