

In Class Skills: Concentrating & Staying Focused

You cannot focus in class, if you aren't actively engaged...

Most graduate students (students who have been through school and been successful) can't focus on a topic for more than 20 minutes if they're not active! This means that concentrating during an 80 minute lecture is almost impossible if you aren't being active. The following are suggestions on how to actively focus in class.

- ◆ Before class, make a list of external and internal distractions that keep you from paying attention during a lecture. Internal distractions include things like worries about other classes, personal responsibilities, etc. External distractions include things like noise in the classroom and cellphones. Next, write out ways to proactively avoid those distractions and reactively respond to those distractions. This will help prepare you for any distractions that might arise.
- ◆ In class, try to sit in the front. This makes it harder to get distracted by items like cellphones and chatty classmates because you're behavior is in plain sight of the instructor. Sitting in front also makes it easier to see and hear what you're instructor is presenting.
- ◆ Participate in class discussions. Ask questions and make thoughtful contributions in class. This helps you stay engaged and boosts your participation grade.
- ◆ Take good notes! Don't just copy what your instructor says verbatim. This form of note taking is very easy to do without actually listening! Instead, develop a strategy for taken notes (on the back of this handout) that help you retain what you learn during a lecture.
- ◆ Build a relationship with your professor. If you're professor knows you, he/she will expect you to pay attention during class and participate. Building a relationship with your instructor motivates you to want to not only come to class, but come to class prepared and engaged.

In Class Skills: Taking Notes

- ◆ **Determining What to Write:** Do not try to take down everything that the lecturer says. It is impossible and because not everything is of equal importance. Spend more time listening and attempt to take down the main points. If you are writing as fast as you can, you cannot be as discriminating a listener. There may be some times, however, when it is more important to write than to think. Figuring out how to handle this balance is critical to effective note taking.
- ◆ **Develop a Note Taking System:** Many people develop their own note taking system naturally however; examining other note taking systems such as Cornell Notes could be useful. *Refer to the Note Taking Systems PowerPoint for more information.
- ◆ **Anticipate:** Leave a few spaces blank as you move from one point to the next so that you can fill in additional points later if necessary. If a professor writes three bullet points on the board write them down with space and fill in the details as they are revealed.
- ◆ **Short Hand Form:** Make your original notes legible enough for your own reading, but use abbreviations of your own invention when possible. Examples include: Gov = Government, NRG = energy, \$ = money, etc...
- ◆ **Be Alert:** Pay attention to visual or verbal cues that would indicate if the professor is trying to stress a certain point or topic. This may lead to insight into questions or topics on an exam.
- ◆ **Ask Questions:** If the professor allows questions during lecture do not be afraid to ask for clarification of a point they are trying to make. When a professor is explaining an exam be sure you completely understand what will be required of you on the test.