

Lecture listening and note-taking: developing an efficient approach

Academic Skills and Language Workshop
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Aims

1) Raise awareness of and practise:

- note-taking techniques
- lecture listening strategies

2) Highlight sources of further help and practice

Based on material from *Study Listening* by Tony Lynch
(Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition 2004)

Difficulties in lectures

Have you ever had difficulty listening to lectures in your own / a foreign language?



Difficulties in lectures

With a partner, list the things which might make it difficult to hear or understand what a lecturer is saying.

Use the four headings below:

- Physical setting
- Speaker
- Subject
- Language

- Physical setting

size / acoustics of room

noise from outside / inside

- Speaker

accent

poor delivery (e.g. too quiet, boring intonation)

speed of speaking – lack of adequate pauses

lecturing style (scripted / based on brief notes)

jokes

- Subject

unfamiliarity

lack of interest / relevance

complexity / abstractness

- Language

colloquial English

technical vocabulary / familiar vocabulary used in an unfamiliar way

foreign words and phrases (*sine qua non*, *de rigueur*)

Note-taking in lectures

The listener has to decide...

- Step 1 what is being **said**
- Step 2 what it **means** (how it relates to what has been said)
- Step 3 whether it is **important** and whether to note it down
- Step 4 how to write it **in note form**

Note-taking in lectures

Q: which step is the most important?

- Step 1 what is being **said**
- Step 2 what it **means** (how it relates to what has been said)
- Step 3 whether it is **important** and whether to note it down
- Step 4 how to write it **in note form**

Note-taking in lectures

A: the most important step:

- Step 1 what is being **said**
- Step 2 what it **means** (how it relates to what has been said)
- **Step 3** whether it is **important** and whether to note it down
- Step 4 how to write it **in note form**

Note-taking techniques



From “This is how modern students take notes” by Jeff Dunn (Edudemic, 2012).

Note-taking techniques

Discuss in pairs:

- How is note-taking different from dictation?
- What is the purpose of making notes?
- Who are notes written for?

3 basic rules

- **Rule 1: Be selective**

decide what's important

- **Rule 2: Be brief**

use abbreviations and symbols

- **Rule 3: Be clear**

show the interrelationship between the speaker's points

Rule 1: Be selective

A first-year undergraduate and a first-year postgraduate studying the same subject attend the same lecture.

What differences would you expect to see in their notes?

Rule 2: Be brief

What **abbreviations, symbols or other techniques** do ***you*** use to represent

example

important point

causes / leads to

is caused by

more than

international

problem

solution

is the same as

goes up / raises

I don't understand

Is this right?

Rule 3: Be clear

common formats:

- linear
- mind map
- Cornell notes

linear notes

Food Irradiation

/consumers

- long-term consequences / health ?
- irradiation → breaks food molecules
→ cancer
- irradiation ↓ nutritional content
vitamin B ↓ 26%

risks >> benefits

/agriculture industry

- shelf-life ↑
- longer distances transport
- → outsource production to cheaper countries

+ profit

mind map

(a.k.a. spidergram, key word pattern, branching notes...)



Mind Map: Proteins (detailed) based on p.122-127, Book 1, SK277, Human Biology

Cornell notes

John Q. Student
Biology 101
April 1, 2000

Phylum	Arthropods
subphylum	Chelicerata
Chelicerata	2 parts: → prosoma (first pair of appendages are for feeding) → opisthoma
examples	scorpions, spiders, mites, ticks
Prosoma ↓ Opisthoma	sensory, feeding, and locomotor tagma
Chelicerae	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pincerlike or chelate • used for feeding • first pair of appendages
Pedipalps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • second pair of appendages • used for sensory purposes
	feeding locomotion reproduction

Phylum arthropods is made up of subphylum chelicerata. Subphylum chelicerata is characterized by two parts called prosoma and opisthoma. The prosoma and cephalothorax are sensory, feeding, and locomotor tagma. The chelicerae is the first appendage and refers to the pincerlike. The pedipalps are the 2nd pair of appendages, and they are used for sensory purposes: feeding, locomotion, and reproduction.

Discuss with a partner:

- What might be the advantages (or disadvantages) of these methods?
- What method(s) of note-taking do you normally use?
- Why?
- Have you tried any other methods?
- Do you make notes by hand or on a laptop / tablet? Have you used note-taking software?
- Do you ever record lectures? Is this helpful?

Note-taking practice 1

You are going to practice taking notes from an audio-recording of a short (4 minute) talk:

Two functions of listening

Tony Lynch

Emeritus Professor of Student Learning, University of Edinburgh

Try a note-taking method you don't normally use.

Comparing notes: content

Compare your notes with another student's:

- Have you included the same information?
- If you missed any points, has your partner made notes on them?
- If there were points (or words, or sections) that neither of you could understand, see whether others in the class can help.

Comparing notes: form

- How did you get on with the method you used?
- Would you use it in the future? Why (not)?

Strategies for efficient listening

6 general 'macrostrategies' for successful listening:

Internal

- Predicting
- Monitoring
- Inferencing
- Evaluating

Interactive

- Responding
- Clarifying

Internal strategies

Predicting

Thinking about the possible content of the lecture **before** you listen

Predicting

Use 2 types of information:

Background

- general knowledge of the world
- knowledge of local culture
- **specific subject knowledge**

Context

- situation (who is speaking, where, when)
- the co-text – what has been said so far

Internal strategies

Monitoring

Noticing your problems **as you listen** and identifying areas of uncertainty

Monitoring

Involves asking yourself questions, e.g:

- Have I **heard** that correctly?
- Have I understood **what was meant**?
- Have I understood **why** s/he said it?
(e.g. **jokes, cultural references**)
- Has the lecturer **changed topic**?
- **Where** is this leading to?

Internal strategies

Inferencing

= guessing!

Making **hypotheses** when you aren't sure of something. e.g. the meaning of an unfamiliar word or expression

Inferencing

Helps us to cope with situations such as:

- the information we get is **incomplete**
- we **don't know the expressions** the speaker is using
- we hear a familiar word, but used in an **unfamiliar** way
- we **can't hear** what someone is saying

Internal strategies

Evaluating

Assessing **how well** you have understood the lecture

Evaluating

Evaluating your success in listening can help you to:

- identify which **areas of knowledge** you need to work on
- identify which **listening skills** to practise more
- compare your listening skills in **different subject areas** of your course
- assess your **progress** in listening over time



Interactive strategies

Responding

Giving **your own opinion** on the ideas presented by the lecturer

Responding

Responding involves asking yourself questions such as:

- Do I accept that what the lecturer is saying is **true** and **relevant**?
- Can I think of **other examples** that support – or don't support - what the lecturer has said?
- Do I think the lecturer's opinions are **reasonable**?



Interactive strategies

Clarifying

Preparing **questions** that you can ask the lecturer to get a clearer understanding

Clarifying

When you ask a question, you can help the lecturer to give the information you need by making clear whether the problem was due to:

- not **hearing** what the lecturer said
- not **understanding** what the lecturer meant
- not **seeing the connection** between different parts of what was said

More practice

Your opportunity to practice these strategies and your note-taking techniques.

You are going to watch a video recording of a TED talk by a psychologist about working memory:

How your working memory makes sense of the world by Peter Doolittle (professor of educational psychology in the School of Education at Virginia Tech).

The talk lasts about 10 minutes.

Predicting

Before you watch, discuss with a partner:

- **Have you watched any TED talks before? In what ways might you expect this talk to differ from a normal university lecture?**
- **How much do you know about ‘working memory’? If you don’t know the term, guess what it could refer to. If you have studied psychology, you may be able to explain!**
- **How relevant do you expect the content of the talk to be to the task of listening and note-taking?**
- **Do you think it might offer advice that could be helpful to you in your academic studies?**

Note-taking practice 2

As you watch and listen, **take notes** on the talk using any method you like.

http://www.ted.com/talks/peter_doolittle_how_your_working_memory_makes_sense_of_the_world

Comparing notes

Show another student your notes and compare:

- the **content** – do you agree on what the main points were?
- the **form** – what method did you use? How well did it work?

Post-listening discussion:

internal strategies

- **Predicting** How accurate were your predictions?
- **Monitoring** Were you aware of any difficulties as you listened?
- **Inferencing** Did you have to **guess** what the speaker said / meant at any stage? Did you understand why the audience **laughed**?
- **Evaluating** How much (%) would you say you understood? How does that compare with listening to your subject lectures – better / worse / the same?

Post-listening discussion: interactive strategies

Responding

- How effective was the presentation?
- How useful did you find the content?
- How did it relate to our advice on listening and note-taking?
- Did it give you any ideas on making your studying more effective?

Post-listening discussion: interactive strategies

Clarifying

- Write down **one question** you would have liked like to ask the lecturer.
- Discuss it with your partner. What would you predict the answer to be?



Where next?

TV and **radio** are very useful resources for listening practice.

Which do find more useful? Explain your answer to another student.

Look at the list below and decide which types of TV / radio programme you think are (a) **most useful** and (b) **least useful** for improving your listening to English. Discuss the **reasons** for your choice.

local news

political discussion

quiz show

science programme

drama

international news

cartoon

American sitcom

film

weather forecast

ELE help

ELSIS (English Language Support for International Students)

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/students/current-students/elsis>

- **ELSIS** course ***Lecture Listening and Note-taking*** (focus on Predicting, Monitoring & Responding) – Semester 1 dates

From week beginning 23 October 2017:

Mondays or Wednesdays 16.10-18.00 (4 weeks).

Paterson's Land, Holyrood Road.

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/students/current-students/elsis/elsis-courses/listening-to-lectures-and-note-taking>

- **Independent Study** materials (download):
Lecture Listening and Note-taking
Effective English Learning: unit on **Listening**

Summary

Note-taking: 3 basic rules

1. Be selective
2. Be brief
3. Be clear

Try different methods

Strategies for efficient listening:

- Predicting
- Monitoring
- Inferencing
- Evaluating
- Responding
- Clarifying

Any questions?



Feedback survey

- <https://edinburgh.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/english-language-education-student-workshops>