Understanding the Lecture

Listening and Note Taking

I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant. – quote from the 1960’s

The speaker controls what is said and how it is organized. To be sure you “realize that what you heard is what is actually meant,” you need to control the way you listen to get the most from the lecture. You must use what you know to interpret, organize, and store what you hear. Such information is then available for later retrieval and use. Whatever the lecture ability or style of your instructor, you need a way to understand and remember information. The following list shows a plan for maximizing your understanding of what you hear.

- Sit close to the front of the class.
- Sit comfortably erect and look attentive. Slouching makes you sleepy and indicates to your instructor your disinterest.
- Have a purpose for listening.
- Take notes.
- Pay careful attention to the instructor’s introductory and summary statements. These usually state main points.
- Concentrate on what the instructor is saying. Try to ignore external distractions. Try to eliminate internal distractions.
- Think of questions you would like to ask or comments you want to make.
- Listen for transition words that signal main points.
- Mark words or references you don’t understand and look them up later.
- Be flexible—adjust your listening and note taking to the lecture.
- Avoid distracting others (keep your hands still, wait your turn in discussions, avoid whispering, etc.).
- If the instructor speaks too quickly or unclearly, then
  - Ask the instructor to speak more slowly or to repeat information;
  - Leave plenty of white space and fill in missing details immediately after class;
  - Exchange copies of notes with fellow classmates;
  - Ask the instructor for clarification after class; and
  - Be sure to preview lecture topic before class

Source: College Learning and Study Skills, Rhonda Atkinson and Debbie Longman, West Publishing Co.