
Before, During & After Lecture: The Study Cycle—What do we do with our notes?

Making the Most of Lectures: The Study Cycle

Lectures are central to university learning, with much of the essential information delivered directly by your professors. Unlike reading textbooks at your own pace, lectures move according to the instructor's timeline meaning you can't pause, rewind, or slow things down in real time. Even with recorded lectures, it can be harder to stay attentive. Because of this, it's important to use intentional strategies before, during, and after lectures to help you focus, stay engaged, and retain what you've learned.

Before the Lecture: Set Yourself Up for Success

Preview the Material:

Read assigned chapters or complete practice problems before attending class. This helps activate your memory so you're more prepared to absorb new information and connect it to what you've already learned. Pre-reading also means lecture content will feel more familiar, which makes it easier to identify key points.

Review the Course Outline:

Take a few minutes to check the syllabus or course schedule to get a sense of the lecture's focus and learning objectives.

Refresh Your Memory:

Skim through your notes from the last class to reconnect with past material. Even 5–10 minutes of review can strengthen your understanding.

Prepare Questions:

Write down any questions you have whether from previous classes, readings, or your own curiosity. Keep an ear out for answers during the lecture, and don't hesitate to ask for clarification if needed.

For Online (Live) Classes:

Test your internet connection ahead of time. Minimize bandwidth use by pausing other devices' streaming or downloads. Close unnecessary browser tabs to reduce lag or distractions.

During the Lecture: Stay Engaged and Take Effective Notes

Choose the Right Environment:

In-person, sit closer to the front to stay attentive. For virtual classes, find a quiet spot where you can focus. Headphones can help drown out background noise. Keep your phone and social media out of reach multitasking harms learning.

Take Organized, Useful Notes:

- Prioritize key ideas and concepts over trying to write everything down word for word.
- Use abbreviations, bullet points, and shorthand to save time.
- Highlight confusing points to review later.
- Pick a note-taking method that suits you: handwritten, digital, or stylus/tablet-based. Be consistent.

Focus on Lecture Objectives:

If your instructor follows the syllabus closely, connect your notes to the session's objectives or learning outcomes. If you get lost, mark your notes so you can revisit that section later. For recorded lectures, take advantage of pause and rewind functions to help you keep up.

Listen Actively:

Pay attention to the professor's cues emphasis, repetition, examples, tone changes, or phrases like "*this is key*" often signal important content. Also, note any logistical details such as deadlines, exam dates, or suggested study tips.

After the Lecture: Reinforce Your Learning

Quiz Yourself:

Turn your notes into questions and test your recall this active retrieval strengthens memory better than passive review. Consider using higher-order thinking questions (e.g., "*Why does this matter?*" or "*How does this connect to other topics?*").

Summarize What You Learned:

In your own words, recap the main ideas and explain them to someone else or write them out. Teaching others is one of the best ways to deepen your understanding.

Review and Revise Notes:

After class, fill in any missing details and clear up confusion by seeking help from your professor, teaching assistant, or classmates. Access any posted lecture recordings or transcripts if available.

Create a Study Guide:

Combine your lecture notes with key points from the textbook or readings. Highlight essential terms, identify key themes, and map out connections between concepts. This will create a comprehensive resource for exam preparation.

By following this “study cycle,” you’ll strengthen your understanding, improve retention, and be better prepared for exams and assignments.

References:

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