

# Lectures in the Classroom

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about lectures and what is expected of students during lectures. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Lectures

The format for delivering instruction that perhaps most distinguishes higher education from what you might have experienced in high school is the **lecture**. The lecture format is a style of teaching and learning in which the instructor does most of the talking, providing students with a lot of information that may or may not be supplemented by audio/visual resources.

While many instructors improvise, update, and vary their lectures from class to class or term to term, a lecture is generally more like a prepared speech. Besides conveying the facts and general information relevant to the course, a lecture is an opportunity for instructors to demonstrate their expertise and their particular insights into the course material.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Lecture

A presentation your instructor gives to explain or elaborate on the concepts from your course. During lectures, you should listen, take meaningful notes, and prepare questions to ask.

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## 2. Student Behavior During Lectures

When a class is conducted in the lecture format, students can feel like they are more anonymous or more invisible, which can increase the temptation to tune out and daydream or check their phones. Because students in lectures are less frequently called upon or expected to directly contribute, they can begin to feel that they have fewer or no responsibilities. This is not the case.

First of all, you are not invisible—instructors notice and are affected by distracted students, even in a big classroom with a lot of students.

Also, your instructor may not be able to see what's on your laptop screen but the students around you can—your distraction is distracting to others.

In addition to the role you play in contributing to a productive classroom by not distracting your instructor and your classmates, you should be attentive and engaged in a lecture because it's important to your education. There will likely be certain classes or certain instructors that you find less exciting or even boring, but it will be worth it to summon some self-discipline and do your best to stay engaged.

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### 3. Note-Taking

One way to stay engaged in your courses, and also compile your own resources for future exams and assignments, is to take notes. The practice of taking good notes can be a key to your success in a class.

Notes are significant for a couple of reasons. First of all, deciding what to take note of—what to write down—forces you to think critically about which information is most important. If you want a full record of an instructor's lecture, you might ask them if you can use a recording device, but for the purposes of note-taking, it won't be efficient to transcribe a lecture word-for-word. So you have to actively engage with the material and make decisions; your notes will reflect the class material filtered through your perspective, giving you a chance to record your own comments, questions, and connections.

In addition, recall that many students learn best through reading and writing. The process of writing down important information can help you to absorb and retain it.

At a minimum, your notes should include:

- Date you are taking notes.
- Topic you are taking notes on.
- Keywords that relate to the topic.
- Questions you come up with.
- Main idea and a summary of what you learned.

Other information such as dates of importance, details, definitions, formulas, examples, and pictures or charts should be included if they are relevant to your understanding and remembering of the concepts.

#### WHAT TO WRITE IN YOUR NOTES

##### ALWAYS INCLUDE

THE **DATE** YOU ARE TAKING NOTES  
**TOPIC** YOU ARE TAKING NOTES ON  
**KEY WORDS** THAT RELATE TO THE TOPIC  
**QUESTIONS** YOU HAVE  
THE **MAIN IDEA**  
A **SUMMARY** OF WHAT YOU LEARNED

##### IF RELEVANT

Dates  
Details  
Definitions  
Formulas  
Examples  
Pictures or charts

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## 4. Asking Questions

A big part of being proactive in maximizing your learning experience is taking the initiative to ask questions when you don't understand or you need clarification on something you've read or something your instructor or classmates have said.

Asking questions is a key component of thinking critically and fully exploring the concepts you encounter in your courses. When you ask a question, you build on the foundation the instructor has established; individual student voices and perspectives enrich the learning experience.

More practically, asking a question is a way to customize your education by getting the information that you need. If you don't understand something, you can leave class without understanding it or you can pursue understanding by asking a question.

That said, it is important to observe classroom etiquette in terms of when and how to ask questions. In a lecture format, certain professors might prefer that you wait for them to invite questions. In a more discussion-based classroom, you might be welcome to ask questions whenever they occur to you, but the instructor may prefer you to raise your hand to indicate you have a question and wait for them to call on you.

Online courses might have their own policies for asking questions—you might be encouraged to post questions in an online forum or to contact your instructor during “virtual office hours.”



### BIG IDEA

The dynamic of asking and answering questions is central to the concept of education—and it goes both ways. Typically, you might think of students asking questions of their teachers; after all, the teachers are supposed to be the ones with the answers. But obviously, teachers ask questions of their students as well—to test their knowledge on an exam, but also to frame a class discussion.

In fact, the Socratic method is a style of teaching named for the ancient Greek philosopher and teacher Socrates. The Socratic method is discussion-based; the teacher strategically asks the students questions to hone their critical thinking skills by drawing out their biases and presumptions and ultimately leading them to articulate the “correct” answers.

### IN CONTEXT

Imagine you are taking an online class on American Poetry and the instructor asks you to read this famous short poem by William Carlos Williams and post discussion questions about it without doing any research. Here is the poem:

*so much depends  
upon  
a red wheel  
barrow  
glazed with rain  
water  
beside the white  
chickens.*

What questions can you come up with?



## SUMMARY

**Lectures** are an opportunity for your instructor to explain and contextualize course concepts. You should consider **student behavior during the lecture**. During lectures, you should be actively listening, **taking notes**, and thinking of relevant **questions to ask**.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Lecture

A presentation your instructor gives to explain or elaborate on the concepts from your course. During lectures, you should listen, take meaningful notes, and prepare questions to ask.