

## TAKING NOTES IN A DISCUSSION-BASED COURSE

In a lecture-based course, students spend most of their class time taking notes. It is clear that most of the material presented by the professor should be recorded for future study. In contrast, in a discussion-based course the professor poses questions, discussion follows, and there is give-and-take among the students and the professor. It is not so clear what is important, so students often make the mistake of writing too little or nothing in their notes.

**Notes from a discussion-based course may be brief, but they are extremely important.**

### WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

#### During class:

1. Write down the topics covered or the questions your professor asks – a simple list is fine.
2. Write notes which include key information about each topic or your fellow students' answers to each question. Since students may give answers which are not correct, pay close attention to those answers which seem to elicit a positive response from your professor. If you're not sure what answers may be correct, leave space to write in that information later. Or ask your professor to clarify during the class.
3. If a professor poses a question and the question remains unanswered, make a notation in the margin and be sure to write out an answer later. Such questions often reappear on tests, quizzes, or papers.
4. Sometimes a professor will summarize the important points made during a discussion. It is wise to note these points. These summaries often occur at the beginning or end of a class.
5. Be ready to shift gears.  
Most professors who teach using discussion also convey specific information to the class by lecturing. Sometimes this presentation may take a few minutes; at times it may take most of the class. Be prepared to take complete notes whenever the professor lectures, whether it is a few sentences or a longer lecture. This note taking is particularly important in a discussion-based course because the information may not appear in your textbook at all.

#### After class:

The day of the class, return to your class notes – before you forget what you heard!

1. Look over your notes. Make certain you have listed all the topics discussed during the class.
2. Make certain you have summarized major points to remember as well as possible answers to any questions.
3. Make note of any unanswered questions or unclear answers. See whether you can find answers in your textbook.
4. If any part of your notes is unclear or answers to any of your professor's questions remain fuzzy, make a notation and ask your professor for clarification in the next class.
5. If you are concerned about your notes, call the Learning & Advising Center at (215) 951-2730 and set up an appointment with a professional tutor. Help is available for you!