



## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LECTURES

### Use this sheet to help you:

- prepare for and learn from lectures
- manage note-taking during lectures

### 5 Minute Self-Test

1. What are some of the purposes of lectures?
2. How can you prepare for your lectures?
3. How can you improve your ability to understand and record information presented in lectures?
4. What should you do after the lecture to enhance your learning?

## 1. Why Lectures?

Lectures form a significant part of the teaching programme in the Faculty. In lectures you may encounter:

- Overviews of subjects
- Discussions of important theoretical ideas
- Presentations about research that has not yet been published
- Overviews of the literature in your field
- Discussion of different viewpoints and central debates in the field
- Explanations, examples and illustrations
- Insights into the assessment requirements
- Indications of lecturer's expectations
- Models of approaches to problems
- Help with interpreting the material presented in texts and tutorials

Lectures also have some disadvantages:

- Lectures may be large and less interactive than other teaching methods
- While lectures are efficient tools for transmitting information a lot depends on your preparation and attentiveness
- Lectures can sometimes be difficult for second-language learners

Naveh-Benjamin et al (1989) show that even when students begin a course with little organisation, throughout the course they develop conceptual structures that more closely resemble that of the instructor

## 2. Getting The Most Out Of Lectures

### 2.1 Being Prepared

Before you go to your lectures, look at the title or topic of the lecture in the lecture outline. Ask yourself these questions:

- What does the lecture title indicate about the subject of the lecture?
- What are the key concepts that relate to this.
- How will this lecture connect with previous lecture(s)?

If the lecture slides can be downloaded from the LMS, do this and read them. As you read, consider what you already know, what you don't know, what reading might be most appropriate before the lecture and what you may hear in the lecture.

### Pre Reading

It is important that you complete any required reading before the lecture. It will be much easier to listen and you will get much more out of what the lecturer is saying if you already have some background knowledge. If there are areas of the reading that you do not understand, note questions and take these to the lecture with you. The lecturer may cover the answer to your questions in the course of the lecture. If not, take the questions to your tutorial or ask the online tutor if there is one available for the subject.

## Terminology

As you complete the reading, check the terminology. You will feel much more confident if you already have some knowledge of the vocabulary, especially in the early stages of your course when you are becoming familiar with economic, accounting and/or management terminology. All academic disciplines have specific terminology – look at it as a form of expert shorthand. It may seem difficult at first, but as you become familiar with words you will come to realise how useful jargon can be. Some of the material you read will have glossaries or definitions of terms and you may want to add to these in your own words.

## In the Lecture

When you arrive at your lecture, sit somewhere where you can hear easily and will not be distracted. Often the front and centre are the best spots. Don't talk while the lecturer is speaking. Lecture theatres are designed so that voices can be heard clearly – if you talk your voice may be a distraction to the lecturer or other students.

## 2.2 Active Listening

One way to get the best out of lectures is to learn to listen actively. This is a skill that can be useful in many areas of your Business and Economics course, as well as later on in your professional career and in your personal life.

- As you listen, concentrate on the main ideas that are being developed. Try to distinguish between the key points that are being raised and examples that are given to illustrate these.
- Think of any questions that were raised by the required reading. Is the lecturer addressing these? Note down any information that relates to your questions, as well as any additional questions raised by the lecture. Leave a wide margin for extra notes to yourself.
- Write yourself reminders in your notes as you listen – 'Must look that up', 'Ask my tutor about that', 'Read up - interesting', 'Find journal article', 'Look for a website'. Engaging in this sort of mental dialogue with the material as it is delivered will help you gain in understanding and is much more effective than letting it just wash over you!
- There are often verbal cues that signify the most relevant or important information – listen for words such as 'remember', 'note well'. Also, listen for qualifying words that the lecturer uses, such as 'sometimes', 'usually', 'rarely' as well as words that indicate a change of direction such as 'however', or 'on the other hand'.
- You may find you need to actively concentrate harder during the second 20 minutes or so – this is when our minds tend to wander. Pay special attention in the last minutes where a summary will probably be given or conclusions made about the topic.
- Don't worry if you don't understand everything, especially in the first few weeks of your Business and Economics course. Some of the ideas will probably also be in the readings and referred to in tutorials. Remember, your listening will improve as you get used to this sort of learning environment.

Typically attention increases from the beginning of the lecture to ten minutes and then decreases after that (Hartley & Davies, 1978)

## 2.3 Taking Notes

Even if you get handouts or are provided with detailed slides, take notes. However comprehensive the downloadable lecture slides might be, it is always important to take notes as you listen.

Taking notes during lectures has the advantages that

- it keeps you alert and focussed in the lecture
- it forms a permanent record of what was said
- it helps with later study
- you can put the ideas in your own words
- you can use them for discussion with other students
- they can be used as a basis for writing reports, essays and assignments

Note taking during lectures or tutorials is a key factor contributing to your learning. Your lecture notes will provide you with an outline of the most important ideas and concepts in the subject and will guide your wider reading and revision. Each lecturer has a different style, speed and method of teaching and you will need to adjust to these different approaches.

Writing down (or trying to) everything the lecturer says is not a good idea. It is better to have a set of meaningful notes that summarise the main ideas of the lecture. Good notes are designed to be brief and to jog your memory. They clarify major points and help you to remember them later. Always remember to make a note of the date and time in your notes for every lecture.

Several studies show that students who take notes in lectures remember better than those who don't (Biggs, 2000, p. 101; Hartley & Davies, 1978; Peper & Mayer, 1978; Weiland & Kingsbury 1978)

When you are making notes, remember that you must be able to understand them later. They must be worth looking through when you come to do your assignments and exams. Neatness is not an issue as long as you can understand them. Try to develop a shorthand of your own - imp for important, d'ment for development and C20 for twentieth century, for instance. Use standard abbreviations where possible - eg (for example), nb (note well) and ie (that is) are a few. On a practical level, think of what you will need to take to the lecture to get a good set of notes - the slides you have downloaded from the LMS, an A4 pad, pens and pencils - coloured pens are a good idea in Business and Economics lectures for diagrams and graphs.

In the first few weeks of your Business and Economics course, if you are not an English speaker you might want to take notes in your own language if this is faster and easier. Remember to practice your written English skills outside lectures. After a few weeks it is better to write the main ideas in English.

You will need to think about what the lecturer is saying as he/she is saying it and note down the main points. It is also a good idea to note down any information which the lecturer writes on the board or displays on overheads or projection screens and add your own comments, reflections and/or explanations to these.

Make your notes brief. Try to organise them under headings. You should be able to pick headings from the lecture content. Try to 'chunk' ideas into blocks. Get the bigger picture and try to relate the ideas to others you have learnt.

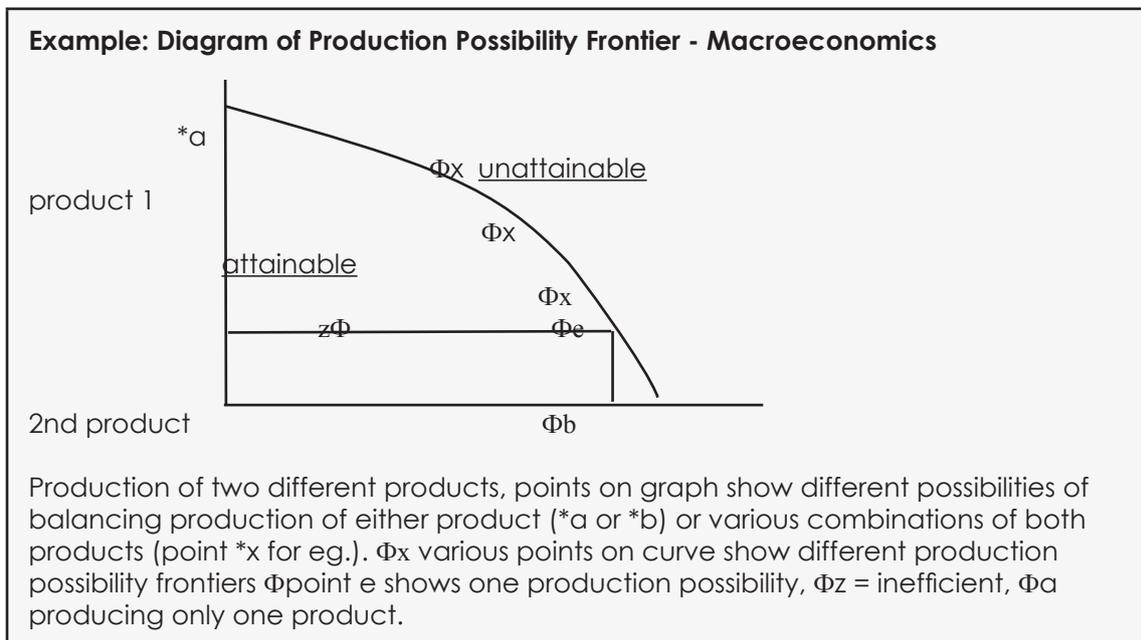
Example:

Notes with a column of comments made during revision of a lecture in Macroeconomics

<p>Lecture Notes 22/3/2001</p> <p>Economics Questions: Goods and service – valuable things produced</p> <p>Gds – tangible Services intang. Big ?s What/How many? How produced? When? Where? Who consumes?</p> <p>Choices = trade off. Each choice = cost Opportunity cost – highest altern. not done Choices made margin cost of increase in activity</p> <p>Incentive - reward to take action</p> <p>Changes in marginal costs + benefits B choices in response to incentives</p> <p>Voluntary exchnng. Beniff. Buyer seller market Markets/exchnge. Work \$, buy goods and services Firms \$labour sell goods Market failure market does not use resources effic.</p> <p>Whole economy: expenditure =income=value of producn. Whole eco: total expend. =total income Increase in producn. = increase in living standard (prodn. Per person)</p> <p>Prices Amnt. Of money inc. faster than producn. = inflation Unemployment expected. Fluctuates sometimes result market failure</p>	<p>Study notes</p> <p>Eg. given p7 textbook</p> <p>8 major questions in economics</p> <p>See Article "Between the Lines"(Text)</p> <p>(look at "command System as an exception)</p> <p>Look at definition of terminology in text book glossary – imp. For major concepts in subject</p>
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Leave lots of space between the main ideas in your notes. This will allow you to continue to add notes in your own words later on. In this way you can integrate what you already know with the lecture material. This will enable you to learn at a deeper level.

One special feature of Business and Economics lectures, of course, is the use of formulas, diagrams and graphs in lectures. When you are adding these to your notes, make them large. Use different colour pens to make the diagrams clearer. You can then add to, or modify, the diagram without losing the main idea. Be sure to label the axis on diagrams accurately. Make your diagrams large enough so you can add to them throughout the lecture. Think about how the diagram was drawn, make notes on each stage of construction of the diagram. If you still feel lost or that you've missed the main ideas pair up with a friend. It may take a while to find the right person – they should be of similar ability to you and have a similar outlook in relation to study. Compare notes after the lecture to incorporate points that you may have missed.



## 2.4 Revision and Consolidation

After each lecture re-read your notes as soon as you can, ideally within 24 hours. Writing up your notes is important as it helps consolidate your ideas. The process of putting things on paper forces you to think, clarify and evaluate.

Reviewing at the end of a lecture leads to better and more lasting retention (Biggs, 1999)

Try to spend at least 15 minutes going over the notes. Write down the main point you learnt and the things you still don't understand. Regular revision of your notes will be

of great help when it comes to the exams at the end of semester. When you go through your notes, arrange them into headings, subheadings and dot points. Try to sum up the ideas in your own words in a few sentences or short paragraph, or explain them to a friend. If you took notes in your own language, translate them into English.

If you worked with a partner, after the lecture go through the notes making sure nothing was missed. Discuss the difficult ideas – write down your thoughts about these. You might want to photocopy any annotated notes so that you both have a copy.

Try organising your notes into themes, tables or diagrams so that when you come back to look at them later for assignments or exams they make sense and are useful. Make sure that the main points are clear and that you understand the connection between ideas. You can use concept maps to link important ideas in a way that is easy to remember. Both concept maps and diagrams are particularly useful in Business and Economics. If you would like more information about concept maps, see the **Study and Research Helpsheets: Learning to Learn and Concept Mapping**.

### 3. Further Help

You may find that there are still areas about which you are unclear. Don't just suffer in silence! Ask other students in the subject if they understood the lecture and can help you. Approach your tutor during or after your next tutorial. The Online Tutor is also available in many subjects with a 24 hour facility for posting and answering questions. Or you can set up a study group to learn and form networks. If you would like assistance to set up a study group, contact the Faculty of Business and Economics Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching and we will help you.

Finally, students who approach a subject with the intention of understanding the material rather than memorising it learn more effectively and are able apply their knowledge to a range of problems. Lectures that improve your understanding of the subject are the result of an active partnership between you and your lecturer, your tutor and your peers.

### References

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