



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LECTURES

IN

THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND
COMMERCE

2nd Edition

Teaching and Learning Unit, Faculty of Economics and Commerce
2nd Floor Babel Building

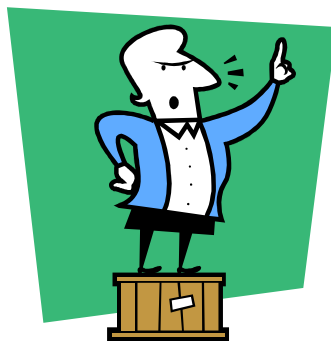


THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

At university you may find that the approaches to teaching are different from school. Several methods of teaching are employed in the Economics and Commerce faculty. These include lectures, tutorials, workshops and study groups. In addition, your private study is very important and you are expected to work independently of the contact hours that you have with lecturers and tutors.

Each method will help you to learn and all are important. Lectures are not sufficient on their own to help you gain a deep understanding of the subject matter. Lectures are just one facet of your course. Nevertheless, getting the most out of them can help you to participate well in tutorials, give you a basis for essay writing, guide your reading and assist you in your preparation for exams and other forms of assessment.

This booklet aims to assist you to use the lecture as an efficient aid to your learning in the Economics and Commerce Faculty.



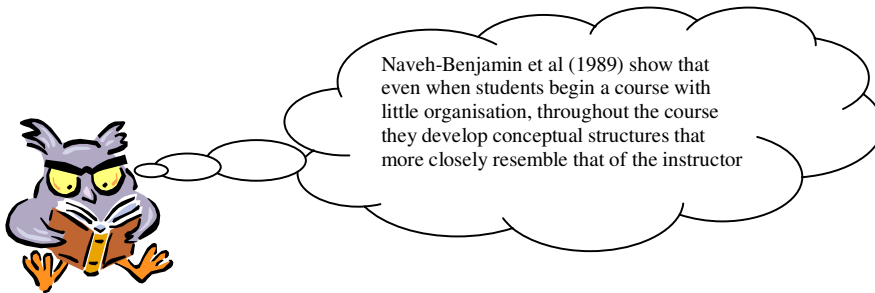
1. WHY LECTURES?

Lectures form a significant part of the teaching programme in the Faculty. They have the following functions.

- They provide an overview of the subject
- Important theoretical ideas can be developed
- New research can be taught before it is published in texts
- They give an overview of the literature in the field that will help you to structure your reading
- A particular viewpoint can be developed
- Explanations and illustrations can be given
- Examples of key concepts can be provided
- They can provide important insights into the assessment in the subject
- They can give information as to the lecturers expectations of the subject standard
- Conflicting points of view and the central debates in the field can be developed
- The lecturer can model a way of approaching a problem
- They can provide you with a meaningful way of organising ideas
- Critical perspectives can be developed
- They help you interpret 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



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)?

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 towards 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.

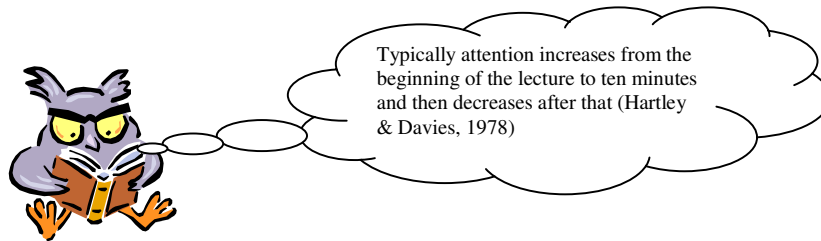


2.2 Active Listening

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 Economics and Commerce 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’.
- As you listen, identify a pattern, logical progression or organisation in the lecture. What are the major ideas? Why are they presented in that order? A mental map of the material will help when it comes to organising your ideas later on.
- 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 Economics and Commerce 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.



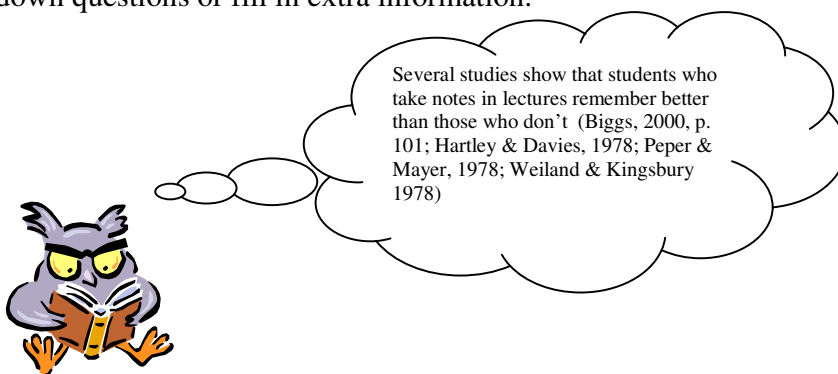
2.3 Taking Notes

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 is also important because it helps you remember. Even if you get handouts, take notes. Jot down questions or fill in extra information.



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.

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 - an A4 pad, pens and pencils - coloured pens are a good idea in Economics and Commerce lectures for diagrams and graphs.

In the first few weeks of your Economics and Commerce 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

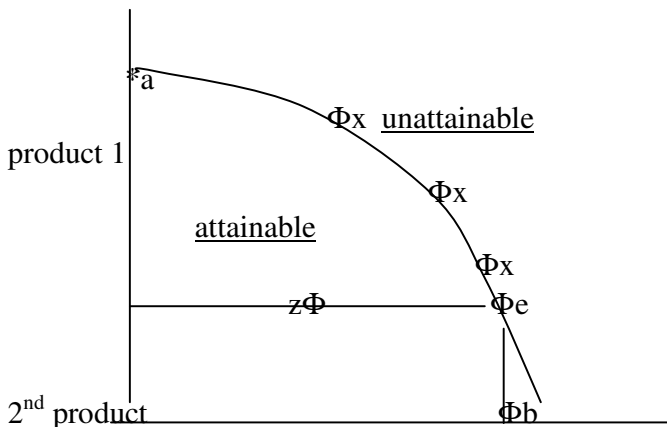
<p>Lecture Notes 22/3/2001</p> <p>Economics Questions: Goods and service – valuable things produced</p> <p>Gds – tangible Services intang. Big ?s What/How many How produced When Where Who consumes</p> <p>Choices = trade off. Each choice = cost Opportunity cost – highest altern. not done Choices made 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. Benift. Buyer seller market</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>
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<p>Markets/exchange. Work \$, buy goods and services Firms \$labour sell goods</p> <p>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>(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 Economics and Commerce lectures, of course, is the use of formulas, diagrams and graphs in lectures. When you are adding these to your notes, make them large – as large as possible. 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.

Example: Diagram of Production Possibility Frontier - Macroeconomics



Production of two different products, points on graph show different possibilities of balancing production of either on product (*a or *b) or various combinations of both products (point *x for eg.). Φ_x various points on curve show different production possibility frontiers Φ point e shows one production possibility, Φ_z = inefficient, Φ_a producing only one product.

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



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

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.

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 Economics and Commerce. If you would like help with concept maps, look at the Faculty of Economics and Commerce Teaching and Learning Unit ‘Learning to Learn’ booklet.

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 – in Economics and Commerce we have found that students find these groups most helpful. They are informal and student-led, and can be a great way to learn and form networks. If you would like assistance to set up a study group, contact the Faculty of Economics and Commerce Teaching and Learning Unit and we will help you – our contact details are below.

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.



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If you would like more help, please contact the Teaching and Learning Unit at the Faculty of Economics and Commerce. You can do this via the website, www.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/tluwww/, or through the faculty office.

The TLU has developed a series of booklets like this one to support you in your Economics and Commerce course. They are:

- Learning to learn
- Getting the most out of lectures
- Getting the most out of tutorials
- Effective reading strategies
- Good writing
- Doing well in exams
- Tips for first years
- Concept mapping
- Basic referencing using the APA system
- Intercultural Communication