

Evaluating a Difficult Lecture¹

Academic Success Center
Iowa State University

This handout is designed to identify why a lecture is difficult for you. Basic ideas suggested to address your difficulties can be addressed through additional handouts and/or academic consultation.

Directions

Choose an instructor for whom lectures seem difficult to you. Check which qualities identify your instructor, and review the suggestions.

Qualities

<input type="checkbox"/> Speaks rapidly.	If your instructor speaks too fast , you must try to keep up with the pace; however, ask yourself, are you trying to match the instructor's speech to the speed of your listening or your writing? Do not get upset if you cannot write down all of the important ideas. Instead, focus on listening for main ideas and supporting details. Make note of the important ideas, and fill in the details using a book and through comparison with your classmates' notes.
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaks slowly.	If your instructor speaks too slow , you risk getting bored or letting your mind wander. Keep listening for the lecture's main focus. Taking notes will help you stay focused.
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaks softly.	If your instructor speaks too softly , listen to the inflections in your instructor's voice, or changes in volume. A change in volume typically signals something more important. An instructor who speaks too softly might require you to listen more actively. Focus on the professor's voice. Sit closer to the front of the room. Pay attention to body language.
<input type="checkbox"/> Does not use the board or overheads.	If your instructor does not use visual aids , look for other cues to highlight important points. Listen for repeated key words/phrases, hand gestures, or questions that signal an important idea. Be sure to read before your class so that you can identify the key points.
<input type="checkbox"/> Is disorganized.	If your instructor is disorganized , listen carefully, writing down any question your instructor leaves unanswered. To get answers, consult your textbook, classmates, library material, or the instructor during office hours.
<input type="checkbox"/> Makes statements you do not agree with.	If your instructor makes statements you do not agree with , try to follow his/her train of thought. You can disagree in your mind, but you must understand his/her perspective, as multiple points of view might be presented.
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaks with an accent.	Most often, your mind simply needs to take time to adjust to hearing an accent. Avoid using this as an excuse for your level of success, and use supplemental material until your brain can understand the accent.
<input type="checkbox"/> Others:	Discuss other qualities with an academic consultant or with the instructor.

¹ Based on: Sotiriou, P E. (1999). *Learning to Listen*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

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