

Using volunteer notes

What are volunteer notes?

This is a free service for students who need support with note taking. Volunteer notes are not intended to replace class attendance; rather, they are a resource for when it is not possible to take notes or attend class for disability-related reasons.

How do I access volunteer notes?

It is important to sign up as soon as possible so you can download and study from your volunteer notes throughout the term. This will support your learning. It also provides an opportunity to resolve any issues accessing notes early on (instead of right before a test or exam!). Notes are typically available 24 - 48 hours after class. You can [find out more information about the Volunteer Note-Taking Program on our website](#).

What do I do if I cannot download volunteer notes or notes are missing or incomplete?

If you are experiencing these or other technical issues with volunteer notes, please contact us at as.notetaking@utoronto.ca as soon as possible so that we can explore possible solutions.

What do I do if I am having difficulty using volunteer notes for disability-related reasons?

Please connect with your accessibility advisor if you are experiencing difficulty using volunteer notes due to disability-related impacts. You can [find your advisors contact information on our website](#).

How do I get the most out of my volunteer notes?

In order to get the most out of your volunteer notes (and your courses!), we recommend that you:

1. Prepare for class
2. Attend classes whenever you are able, and
3. Actively review your volunteer notes after class

Before class

- **Consult your course syllabus.** Use the course description, learning outcomes (if available), and weekly theme to clearly identify the aims of the course and focus of your next class. Reflect on how the weekly theme relates to the course.
- **Complete your assigned reading(s).** Identify new terms, concepts, or approaches. Pay extra attention to emphasized material, like bolded terms, diagrams, or images, as well as key takeaways outlined in chapter summaries.
- **Answer some practice problems or study questions.** Practicing new material before class will make it easier to follow the lecture. It also helps you identify challenging material so that you can seek support or clarification during question periods or office hours.
- **Preview slides.** If lecture slides are available beforehand, skim them to get a sense of the lecture's overall organization and content. If there is an "Overview" or "Agenda" slide near the beginning of the presentation, use it to identify the sections of the lecture. You can use title slides and headers to identify the lecture's main points.

- **Ask questions.** Take time to jot down some questions you anticipate the lecture will answer. This will help you be an active and engaged listener.
- **Review the previous lecture.** Go over the volunteer notes from last class. This will help you refresh your memory and warm up for class, as courses usually build over the term.

During class

- **Be an active listener.** Attend class whenever possible and set yourself up for success. Aim to be well rested and ready to pay attention. If you notice your focus is drifting, try adopting an alert posture. For online classes, get dressed and out of bed so that you feel ready to learn.
- **Reduce distractions.** Power down your devices and turn off notifications. For in-person classes, try sitting front row centre, where you are less likely to be distracted by other students. For online classes, establish a designated time and distraction-free space to attend class. Share your schedule with family members or roommates to avoid interruptions.
- **Determine what listening approach is best for you.** Everyone learns differently. Decide whether listening or a combination of listening and writing is preferable. Some options include:
 - Listening while taking your own notes to combine with the volunteer notes
 - Listening (and writing down a few key words, if helpful)
 - Listening and jotting down timecodes for key topics (during asynchronous lectures or classes where recordings are permitted)
 - Listening and representing information in images or graphics
- **Use signposting to navigate the lecture.** Signposting consists of phrases that help you understand where the lecture is going (e.g., “Today’s lecture will focus on...”, “Let’s apply this to a case study...”, “Here is another illustrative example...”, “Next week we will discuss...”). Signposting helps you identify the lecture’s central objectives. It also helps you identify how supporting information, examples, or sub-points relate to the objectives. In other words, it helps you organize and make sense of the new information you are learning.
- **Pay close attention to emphasis.** Emphasized material is usually important. Your professor may create emphasis through repetition (restating or returning to an idea), visual cues (using bold fonts or headings), body language (pointing), and changes in tone (speaking loudly or slowly).
- **Engage with new material to the degree you are able.** Learning happens before, during, and after class. Aim to get the most out of your learning experience during class so that you are not creating extra catch up after class.

After class

- **Download and read notes as soon as possible.** It is necessary to review your notes, actively study, and space out your learning throughout the term. Download notes weekly to identify early on if any notes are missing. Read the notes over, mark any areas that are unclear or confusing, and seek clarification.
- **Fill in notes.** Take some time to add helpful material to the volunteer notes, such as information you noted or remember from class and relevant information from the readings.
- **Re-listen to key moments.** If your lecture was asynchronous or you had recording permission, use the time codes you jotted down during class to re-listen to challenging, confusing, or important sections. Whenever possible, avoid the temptation to re-listen to the entire lecture, as this is time consuming!
- **Write cues.** Reverse engineering the information in your notes into cues or questions is an effective way to study. In the margin, write questions that relate to the notes. After, cover up the notes and use the questions to quiz yourself. If you have access to practice tests or exams, use these to write cues that reflect the types of questions you may find on a test.
- **Use your notes to create new study tools.** Notes are helpful for studying, but they are just a starting point. Use your notes to develop other study tools, such as flashcards, tables, mind maps, concept charts, summaries, and formula sheets. The act of creating these materials supports your learning and you get to use them after as study tools.
- **Recall material.** It is important to study while class is fresh in your mind. Practice recalling material by writing, drawing, or talking out key information from class, even if you encounter a delay accessing your volunteer notes. When notes are available, check your recollections. Testing your memory and reinforcing, correcting, or adding to your recollections is an effective way to learn.
- **Actively review.** Writing cues, creating study tools, and engaging in recall, are all excellent ways to actively review your notes. Instead of reading the notes passively, it is important to do something with the information. This will help your learning and better prepare you for tests and exams. Other strategies for active review include teaching what you learned to someone else, applying course material to new situations, and practicing new material using study questions, problem sets, and old tests.
- **Use resources and supports.** If you need clarification, consider revisiting your readings, asking your professor or TA questions during office hours, [participating in a Recognized Study Group](#) or studying informally with classmates.

What if I am unable to attend class for disability-related reasons?

If you are unable to attend class, use our tips for before and after class to engage in self-directed studying when you are able. If the class you missed was recorded, schedule a time to “attend” class when you are able.

This handout provides general information about strategies and processes related to using volunteer notes and are subject to change as Accessibility Services makes improvements to better serve students. For the most updated information on all of our policies and processes, please visit our website: accessibility.utoronto.ca.