Muhlenberg College

Note Taking in Lecture and Discussion-Based Classes

Before class: *prepare to listen to and follow the class lecture/discussion*
- ✓ Check your syllabus for clues (How does the reading relate to the course description/objectives? Is there a lecture/discussion topic indicated?)
- ✓ Look over your notes from the previous class, if related
- ✓ Do the assigned reading and make notes
- ✓ Read actively, keeping questions in mind

During class: *consider these suggestions*
- ✓ Write on one side of the page only (use the "blank" side during reviews for questions, text notes, etc.)
- ✓ Put a date and topic heading at the top of each day's notes
- ✓ Pay attention to information not included in the readings
- ✓ Indicate the page number of the text if the instructor mentions it
- ✓ Star anything your instructor implies will be included on the test
- ✓ Put a question mark next to anything that needs clarification
- ✓ If possible, compare notes with someone else
- ✓ Listen actively – write the main ideas and enough detail that the ideas make sense (don't try to write every word)

In a discussion-based class: *be prepared to go with the flow*
- ✓ Write down the QUESTION being discussed
- ✓ Try concept mapping, since discussions aren't always organized and sequential (question in the center of the page, boxed)
- ✓ Listen for themes, issues, relationships, definitions, main ideas, the "big picture"
- ✓ Keep track of who's speaking ("P" professor, "S" student, "M" myself)
- ✓ Pay attention to ideas the professor expands upon, repeats, emphasizes
- ✓ Be aware of the professor's opinion

After class: *take time to review your notes*
- ✓ On the "blank" side of the page, write out questions based on the notes
- ✓ For a discussion-based class, summarize the discussion
- ✓ If possible, include page numbers from the readings that support/refute ideas discussed in class
- ✓ Reflect and record your reaction to points in the discussion
- ✓ Predict potential exam questions
- ✓ Make time for brief, active reviews to improve retention/recall (1st review the same day, 2nd review the following day, 3rd review within the week, 4th review within the month/before the test)