HELP Yourself Resource Transcript: Listening to Lectures

In this video we will consider how best to listen to lectures at university. We discuss some challenges you may encounter, and give you tips on what to do before, during and after a lecture.

Listening to lectures can be a challenge, especially if English is not your first language, if you are a new university student, or if you are studying a new subject. Some students report difficulty with the speed of delivery. It can be difficult to process a lot of information on a new topic in a second language. Each course will have its own terminology and a lot of new vocabulary to learn.

On top of that, it may take time to get used to each lecturer’s presentation style or pronunciation. Perhaps it’s the first time you have heard an Australian accent, or English spoken by people from other countries. Since English is a global language, we need to get used to a variety of accents.

While these may be challenges there are two important research findings you should consider:

1. Students who go to lectures are more likely to do well in their degrees, and
2. Students who do not go to lectures are less likely to improve their English.

This means that the worst thing you can do is to stop attending lectures.

Success in this area depends on three things: what you do before, during, and after class.

Before the lecture

Before each lecture, you should prepare by looking at the material from the previous week to remind you of the new concepts and vocabulary. Then, refer to the material that the lecturer has put up on the Learning at Griffith site for the next lecture, and do any suggested reading. Research shows that preparation for lectures and other classes is linked to academic success. Also, don’t forget to take material with you to class - either on paper or an electronic device. Finally, don’t be late or it will be harder to understand the topic. Try to arrive early.

During the lecture

During the lecture, your job is to stay focused. Sitting near the front can be helpful as you can hear better there and it will help your concentration. Don’t text, use social media, surf the net, or daydream... Try to be present in mind as well as body.

It is important to be an active listener during the lecture because listening is not the same as hearing. How can you be an active listener? Firstly, you should follow the PowerPoint slides or handouts that the lecturer is using. It’s also a good idea to take notes - either by hand or electronically. Even though you can access the PowerPoint slides and other material after the lecture, taking your own notes means that your brain
is forced to be active while listening. This also stops your mind from wandering. You could also write down questions about the content, or make a list of things to follow up on. The more active you are, the more you will understand and remember.

When taking notes, use abbreviations. Some may be standard abbreviations like the ones on the screen. Or you can create your own but make sure you will be able to understand these the next time you look at your notes.

During the lecture, ask your lecturer if something is not clear. Here are some useful questions:

- What do you mean by X… ?
- Would you mind explaining the point about… (in the handout/textbook)?
- I’m sorry - I didn’t catch that last bit.
- Could you say that again, please?

Ask your lecturer to provide a list or glossary of new terms. If your lecturers speak quickly, don’t be afraid to let them know that you are finding it challenging.

After the lecture

After the lecture it’s a good idea to chat to other students about the content because this will help your brain process and recall new information. You should also look back at your notes within 24 hours before your memory starts to fade. Don’t leave it until just before an exam to look back at your notes.

You should also always attend the tutorial as well as the lecture, and complete any tasks and readings. It’s also a good idea to listen again to the recording of the lecture - you can stop and start it if you need to if there are any difficult sections. Learn new words from the lecture each week. Watch the other videos on Vocabulary and Academic Vocabulary about how best to do this.

Remember that listening to all types of English - at university and off campus - will help improve your listening skills. Listen to (or watch) the news each day. Listen to conversations around you in everyday life. Take every opportunity you can to speak and listen in English. This will help develop your listening skills for lectures and other situations.

Over time, if you follow this advice, you will find that listening to lectures becomes easier but you are responsible for making an effort. Don’t give up! Remember that attending lectures is critical for your academic success.

This video has looked at some of the challenges of listening to lectures and provided some advice on what to do before, during and after the lecture. Now try the exercises below.