Use It or Lose It: Reviewing Lecture Notes

Time spent reviewing your notes within 24 hours of the lecture is time well spent. Research shows that if you spend 15 minutes reviewing your notes within a few hours after the lecture, you can increase your understanding of the material by 50%. On the other hand, you will lose an average of 80% of the information in the lecture if you delay longer than 24 hours to review your notes.

Here are some helpful ways to work with your notes:

- Edit your notes by writing out any “shorthand” or symbols that you may not recognize later.

- Add recall words or key questions in the left margins of your notes. Later these words and questions can serve as a pre-test when you are preparing for an exam.

- Find some way of outlining or reworking your notes. Organize them into key points and minor points—so that they read easily. You might decide to use some color coding to highlight terms, key concepts, formulas, or dates.

- Include your own examples in your notes so that you can test your understanding of the material as well as your ability to apply the information.

- Add information from the textbook, such as brief phrases and book page numbers so that you can easily refer back to longer or more complex passages in the textbook.

- Use your notes to make flashcards. Carry them with you and use them to review when you have free time.

- Check your notes for accuracy and understanding. If something is not clear, try to clarify the meaning by using your textbook or by asking a question in the next class session.

- Compare your notes with those of other students. You may find varying perspectives or something you missed.

- If you are a visual learner, create mind maps from your notes that help you see relationships between concepts described in lecture.

- If you are an auditory learner, recite out loud the key points in your notes.

- When it comes to reviewing your notes, remember this: the sooner the better!