

Chapter 3: How Do I Make the Most of Class Time?

Using Class Time Effectively

Any conventional math course has a classroom experience. Usually this classroom experience consists of a lecture, some discussion, and possibly individual and/or group work time. Making the most of each class period is an important part of student success. Although the students are a collective body, most of the study activities a student will engage in while in class should be largely based on their specific learning style.

To begin, you must be prepared for class in order to reap the benefits from class. One of the first components of being prepared for the next class is completing the assignment from the previous one. In addition, all students should have any questions ready to be asked and answered in class. These could be questions from the previous class, the last assignment, or the new material to be covered. Having these questions ready before class will help you to stay focused in class because you will be paying attention while listening for the answers or directly asking the professor.

While in class there are generally three distinct separations of time: lecture/discussion, individual work, and group work. Depending on your particular learning style, what you do personally during these times will determine the benefits you receive or miss out on.

Once class is over, it is important to reinforce the material covered in class. This process usually includes cleaning up notes by rewriting them, filling in any blanks for completeness, and looking for clarifications. Any questions at this point can help to provide a goal and direction for further research and study for the next assignment or class, so be sure to record any you may still have.

Most students that are successful in class do many of the following:

- Arrive to class on time
- Prepare for class (e.g., complete assignments, read the material to be discussed, etc.)
- Sit in a location that is conducive to their learning (toward the center of the room from the front to the back of the class room)
- Actively participate in the class (take part in activities, volunteer solutions, etc.)
- Avoid distractions and do not create any (turns off cell phone, leaves computer off, remains quiet, focuses on the professor, etc)
- Take thorough notes (writes and organizes notes to suit learning style.)
- Ask appropriate questions (to answer questions from past, clarify what's being taught in class, and looking toward future sections)
- Make sure to have and understand the assignment before leaving class (keeps track of assignments based on syllabus, and confirms with professor what is to be completed for the next class)

Below are more ideas for students of each learning style to consider for themselves.

Visual Learners

Before Class

- Read through the notes from the previous classes silently to yourself.
- Watch video lectures on previous and current topics if available.
- Have notebook organized and ready to receive new information (see Chapter 4 on taking notes)

During Class

- Sit in the front of the classroom where the instructor and the presentation are clearly visible.
- Watch for nonverbal cues from the instructor as to what is important to know.
- Take clear and well organized notes on specific topics and comments using a specific note-taking style.
- Draw pictures and diagrams when taking notes.
- Use color in your notes to distinguish types of information written, i.e., definitions, processes, common terms, etc.
- When working on problems on your own, be sure to refer back to steps and guides that were provided to help solve the type of problem you are considering.
- In a group setting, sit where everyone and their work can be seen, if possible.

After Class

- Make sure you can read your notes. If you cannot, rework them to make them more legible.
- Compare notes with a classmate after class.
- Redraw visual aids given or taken in class.
- Whenever possible, visualize how concepts work or how they fit with other knowledge you already have.

Auditory Learners

Before Class

- Read through the notes from the previous class out loud.
- Listen to recording of previous lecture and watch and/or listen to video lectures on past and current material.
- Actively read textbook to be able to listen for answers you may have during the lecture. Develop shorthand skills to maximize your listening time.
- Test yourself on the material from the previous class.

During Class

- During the lecture/discussion time, be sure to sit where you can hear the instructor and all discussion in class. This could be right in the front of the class room, or anywhere that places you in the middle of the seating arrangement while facing the front of the room. Be sure the instructor will always be in front of you not to one side or the other.
- Avoid any environment within the room that will hinder your ability to focus on listening. This means staying clear of any audible distractions in the room for example (this could mean a talkative classmate, or a noisy climate control unit)
- Listen closely to the instructor and be aware of any verbal clues given.
- Ask questions and listen for the answers. This includes listening to questions from other students as well.
- When working alone on practice exercises, talk yourself through the work. Being sure

- to speak to each step what a what, why, and how question about what you are doing.
- If in a group setting, listen carefully to use others' knowledge and questions to clarify your own understanding.
 - If you are using a tape recorder, make note of the counter time when you hear something that you want to go back to after class.

After Class

- After class, review your notes, filling in any additional understanding.
- Replay recordings of class and view any video lectures.
- Discuss material with another student or group of students.

Tactile Learners

Before Class

- Review and rewrite any portions of the previous lecture notes that need reinforcement. Right before class you could physically manipulate something to “activate” your brain and prepare it for class.
- Go through the process of preparing your notebook for note taking. This could mean creating a loose outline for your notes.

During Class

- Take clear and well organized notes on specific topics and comments using a specific note-taking style.
- To help you stay focused, hold something in your hand that will not become a distraction itself (e.g., a stress ball)
- Use special note-taking techniques that force you to be deliberate with what you think and how and where you write something.
- When in a group setting, volunteer to be the note taker, or secretary for the group. This way, you can control what gets reinforced.

After Class

- Rework your notes, including adding additional thoughts and ideas in the margins. Rework examples provided in class.
- Get active while reviewing material (e.g., stand or walk around while studying flash cards)

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Review Questions

1. What are the components of being prepared for class that were discussed in the chapter?
2. List the three distinct separations of class time.
3. What can you do before class to prepare for the lecture?
4. Based on your learning style, what methods will work best for you to get the most of your class time? Why?
5. How do you reinforce the material covered in class?