Why Take Lecture Notes?

Here are some of the reasons why students should be taking notes for themselves. The practice of note-taking develops several important skills—starting with listening. You can't take notes if you aren't listening. You need to be able to take decent notes because in most professional contexts, indeed in life, you are regularly in situations that require taking in and processing information that you need to remember and later apply. You can't always be asking people to give you a copy of what they just told you.

Beyond being an essential basic skill, note-taking offers students the opportunity to make the material their own. That doesn't involve making it mean whatever they want it to mean, but it does allow them to interact with it in ways that develop the learner's understanding of it. Now, this doesn't happen when students equate note-taking with stenography and copy down exactly what the teacher says, and it doesn't happen when students recopy their notes and think that's studying. But it does happen when students work on and with their notes—when they put definitions into their own works, when they list relevant pages in the text, when they re-order the material so that it better connects with their knowledge, and when they write summaries and relate details to main points.

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