



Illinois Wesleyan's Writing Center | Tutoring Services Presents:
Best Practices for Getting the Most Out of Your Courses

Attending and participating in class is one of the most meaningful ways to advance your knowledge and enhance your time at Illinois Wesleyan. To do this work well and meaningfully, you should practice the following:

1. **Attend class regularly and attentively.** Even if your professor does not take attendance, class time is guaranteed time during which you can focus on the subject at hand. Attending class and taking notes, participating, and listening when your professor and peers speak (even noting the things they say) will help you attend attentively.
2. **Prepare for each class session.** Complete the homework, check your notes from the previous class (if applicable), and study a bit of the subject matter each night so that you are prepared for whatever the professor might address in class.
3. **Reflect on each class you attend.** Students often find that they are more successful if they choose to make additional notes after class about what was discussed and summarize up the lessons they just learned. This time can also be used well for writing down any lingering questions you still have to ask during office hours, the next class, or, as a last resort, via email.

These practices are a great starting point, but they each need some more detail.

First, **attending class regularly and attentively means taking good notes and participating.** Taking good notes includes the following:

- Jotting down ideas your professor repeats or goes into at some length.
 - If they say phrases like “this is important” or “this will be on the test,” it’s a good idea to write them down.
 - Don’t be afraid to ask the professor to repeat a point they make, either, particularly if it’s one they’ve articulated is key.
- Writing/typing any examples you find illustrate a concept particularly well.
- Making a note of any questions you have so that you don’t forget what they are.
- Color coding as necessary and returning to your notes after class to create a recap of what you learned so that you have a general study guide for later.

Participating involves a lot more than answering questions when the professor calls on you. It includes:

- Bouncing ideas off of your peers to gain insight into their perspectives, particularly in group work
- Listening and responding to questions your professor *and* peers ask if you can provide meaningful insight.
 - Don’t just talk until you reach an answer. Feel free to take a minute to think through your ideas.
- Asking clear, concise questions when a concept doesn’t make sense.
 - Too often, we assume participation means only answering the professor’s questions. The truth is, it can also mean posing our own.

Then, **preparing for each class session** means not only completing the homework. It also involves:

- Writing down any questions you have about the assigned readings
- Looking for supplemental help when you don't understand an assignment
 - This help at Illinois Wesleyan includes visiting our tutors (TAs, Course-embedded tutors [CETs], Student Success Tutors [SSTs], and Writing Center Tutors [WCTs]), consulting with our librarians, attending your professor's office hours, and doing group work/ study nights with your peers in the course.
- Reading your notes from the previous class to see where materials may connect or where there are links between concepts
 - You can also jot down notes about additional connections. We've seen this method work well with post-its that you can add to your original set of notes.

Lastly, **reflecting on each class** means not only sharing what you learned with friends the days you go to class but also the following:

- Creating a list of takeaways from class—what are the key points your professor and peers covered?
- Going to your professor's office hours, talking with peers, and checking the course website/ syllabus/ calendar if you missed class
- Thinking about the bigger concepts—how does what you learned that day link to what you've learned previously or what you've read for the next class?

If you have to miss class for any reason, here are some best practices:

- Let your professor know ASAP that you're missing or missed class. This notice gives them a chance to give you materials from class, learn what questions you might have, and also lets them know you care enough about the course to be proactive.
 - You might also be able to make up assignments you've missed that you otherwise would not be able to.

Your professor may have even recorded their class and will be willing to share that recording with you if you reach out to them.

- Check the class website/ syllabus for information about what was covered. If you have a friend in the class, it's great to get their insight as well as your professors.
 - You can also borrow your peers' notes to get additional information/ coverage of class topics.
 - Try to get a study group together so that you can all help each other "fill in the blanks" when you have to miss class for any reason.