Tackling Fast Lectures

Some professors have a lot to cover and not much time. The result? Rapid-fire lectures that make it hard to keep up and leave your notes looking incomplete. The good news is that you can train yourself to handle these situations with strategies that boost focus, organization, and confidence.

Quick Strategies to Keep Up

1. Prepare early
Skim your readings before class so the main points already feel familiar.

2. Catch the big ideas
Focus on main concepts instead of writing every word.

3. Swap notes
Compare with a classmate to see what you missed.

4. Leave blanks
Skip space in your notes to fill in later when you review.

5. Speak up
Ask questions during or after class to clarify confusing points.

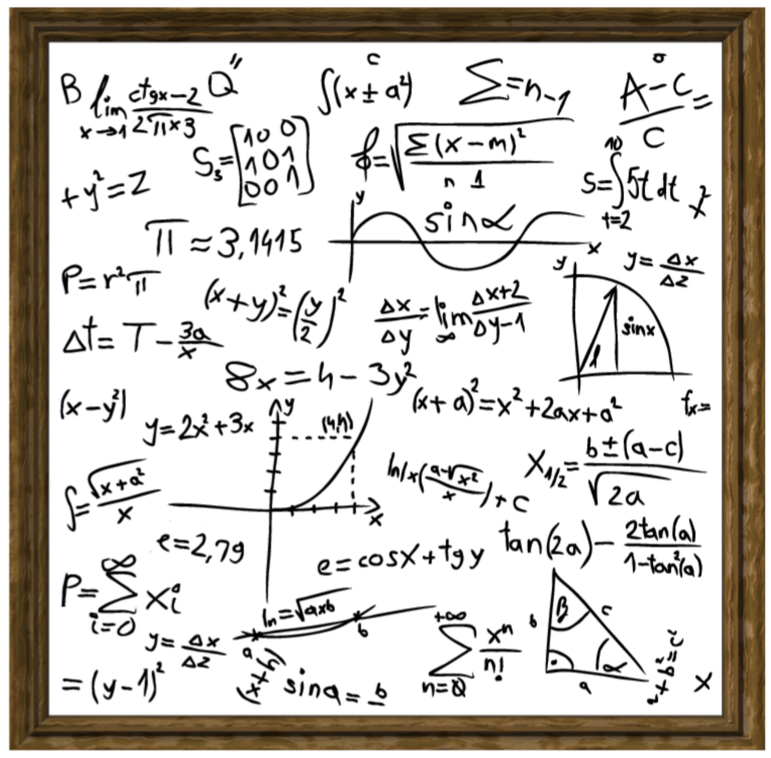
6. Use office hours
Meet with your professor to check your notes and understanding.

7. Record with permission
If allowed, record the lecture and replay it at a slower pace.

8. Note your reading
Write down key ideas before class and add lecture details on top.

9. Repeat exposure
Attend another section if possible to hear the lecture again.

10. Ask directly
Don't be afraid to request the professor repeat or slow down.



Put It Into Action

Use these prompts to apply the strategies and see how they fit into your own classes.

1. What class feels hardest to keep up with right now?

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2. Which of the strategies above do you already use, and which one could you add this week?

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3. Write one specific question you could bring to your professor or a classmate after your next lecture.

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4. After your next "fast lecture," set a timer for 5 minutes and write down the gaps in your notes you want to fill.

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Level Up Your Listening

It’s easy to zone out in lectures for various reasons. For instance it could be because you’re distracted, disagree with the speaker, or you’re busy talking in your own head. The problem is that listening is a skill, and it makes a huge difference in how much you actually learn.

Barriers and How to Overcome Them

1. Prejudging

Prejudging happens when you stop listening because you’ve already decided you don’t agree with the speaker, the way they’re presenting, or who they are.

To Overcome:

- Focus on the message, not the messenger.
- Listen for value, even if the speaker isn’t your favorite or favorite style.
- Keep an open mind toward perspectives that differ from yours.

2. Talking (out loud or in your head)

Talking out loud or in your head gets in the way of listening because it keeps you focused on your own thoughts instead of the speaker’s message.

To Overcome:

- Practice silence and let yourself focus fully.
- Try being quiet for a set time, even in casual settings.
- Ask questions and really listen for the answer.

3. Practice Active Listening

Practicing active listening means giving your full attention to the speaker by staying engaged, noticing details, and responding thoughtfully to what is being said.

To Overcome:

- Sit upright and lean forward to stay engaged.
- Make eye contact.
- Notice what isn’t being said as well as what is.
- Jot down questions to ask later.
- Tune out distractions and keep emotions in check.
- Respond to ideas, not personalities.

Put It Into Action

1. Think of a recent class—did you listen to the message or the messenger? What difference would it make if you switched focus?

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2. Write one open-ended question you could ask a classmate or professor this week, and commit to listening fully to the answer.

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3. On a scale of 1–10, how strong are your listening skills right now? What’s one step you could take to raise your score?

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