Notetaking: Abbreviations and Symbols

Use punctuation or symbols

- Symbols are especially helpful in engineering and mathematics classes. Check your textbook for commonly used symbols. ≠ Δ ∑ π ∞ ±
- Create your own symbols (for organisms vs for people)
- Use an apostrophe: “gov’t,” “am’t,” “cont’d, “educat’l.”
- Use a dot placed over a symbol or word to indicate the word “rate”: \( v \) = vibration rate, \( \dot{f} \) = frequency rate
- Use symbols for commonly recurring connective or transitional words: “&,” “w/,” “w/o,” “vs.”

Use Abbreviations

- Leave out the periods in standard abbreviations: “e.g.” for example, “dept” department, “NYC” New York City.
- Use only the first syllable of a word: “pol” politics, “dem” democracy, “cap” capitalism.
- Use the entire first syllable and only the first letter of the second syllable: “subj” subject, “cons” conservative, “ind” individual.
- If a term, phrase, or name is initially written out in full during the lecture, substitute initials whenever the term, phrase, or name is used again: Modern Massachusetts Party = MMP.

Eliminate letters or punctuation

- Eliminate final letters. Use just enough of the beginning of a word to form an easily recognizable abbreviation: “assoc,” “ach,” “biol,” “info”, “intro”, “chem.”
- Omit vowels from the middle of words, and retain only enough consonants to provide a recognizable skeleton of the word: “bkgd,” “prblm,” “estmt,” or “gvt.”
- Use g to represent ing endings: “decr,” “ckg,” “estg,” “exptg.”
- Leave out unimportant verbs.
- Leave out the words “a” and “the.”

Other tips

- Generally, spell out short words such as in, at, to, but, for and key. Symbols, signs, or abbreviations for short words will make the notes too dense with “shorthand.”
- Abbreviations depend upon surrounding content to be understood. When pressed for time, write down a few key words and fill in your notes with explanations later. You want to be able to read and understand the notes taken.
- As with everything, using abbreviation with notes takes practice. Implement a few rules at a time. When proficient, add more.