

# Taking a Math Test

## Test-Taking Strategy Matters

Just as it is important to think about how you spend your study time (in addition to actually doing the studying), it is important to think about what strategies you will use when you take a test (in addition to actually doing the problems on the test). Good test-taking strategy can make a big difference to your grade!

### Taking a Test

- First look over the entire test. You'll get a sense of its length. Try to identify those problems you definitely know how to do right away, and those you expect to have to think about.
- Do the problems in the order that suits you! Start with the problems what you know for sure you can do. This builds confidence and means you don't miss any sure points because you run out of time. Then try the problems you think you can figure out; then finally try the ones you are least sure about.
- Time is of the essence - work as quickly and continuously as you can while still writing legibly and showing all your work. If you get stuck on a problem, move on to another one - you can come back later.
- Work by the clock. On a 50 minute, 100 point test, you have about 5 minutes for a 10 point question. Starting with the easy questions will probably put you ahead of the clock. When you work on a harder problem, spend the allotted time (e.g., 5 minutes) on that question, and if you have not almost finished it, go on to another problem. Do not spend 20 minutes on a problem which will yield few or no points when there are other problems still to try.
- Show all your work: make it as easy as possible for the Instructor to see how much you do know. Try to write a well-reasoned solution. If your answer is incorrect, the Instructor will assign partial credit based on the work you show.
- Never waste time erasing! Just draw a line through the work you want ignored and move on. Not only does erasing waste precious time, but you may discover later that you erased something useful (and/or maybe worth partial credit if you cannot complete the problem). You are (usually) not required to fit your answer in the space provided - you can put your answer on another sheet to avoid needing to erase.

- In a multiple-step problem outline the steps before actually working the problem.
- Don't give up on a several-part problem just because you can't do the first part. Attempt the other part(s) - if the actual solution depends on the first part, at least explain how you would do it.
- Make sure you read the questions carefully, and do all parts of each problem.
- Verify your answers - does each answer make sense given the context of the problem?
- If you finish early, check every problem (that means rework everything from scratch).

**Reference:**

Department of Mathematics and Computer Science. "Success in Mathematics."  
Saint Louis University <online 6/11/1997>.