

Tips for Taking Math Tests

To Improve your Test Score	Comments
Do not try to review up until the last minute before the test. Instead, go for a walk, do several minutes of deep breathing, and arrive just in time for the test. Ignore what other students are saying just before the test.	Realizing you cannot do a problem 5 minutes before the test may cause you to panic . Then you'll do poorly on the whole test instead of just missing 1 or 2 questions you forgot to study. Moderate exercise and deep breathing will calm your mind.
Come prepared with a pencil (not a pen) and an eraser, calculator, etc. If you are easily distracted, sit in the corner furthest from the door.	Working in pencil means you can erase things instead of crossing them out and making a mess. Be sure your calculator is working properly.
Do a "knowledge dump" as soon as you get the test paper. Write important notes to yourself in a corner of the test paper: formulas you've memorized, common errors you want to watch out for, etc.	Writing down warnings and things that you've memorized lets you relax ; you won't have to worry about forgetting those things and can refer to them as needed.
Scan the entire test, note the point value of different problems, and plan your time accordingly. Allow at least 5 minutes to check your work at the end of the testing time.	If you have 50 minutes to do 20 problems, 50 divided by 20 gives you about 2.5 minutes per problem. Spend less time on easy ones , more on problems with higher point values.
Do not work the problems in order from number 1 through to the end. Pick out easy problems and do those first in order to build confidence. If you feel your anxiety starting to build, immediately stop for a minute, close your eyes, and take several slow, deep breaths.	Doing the easier problems first will improve your confidence , and you will be assured to get those problems completed correctly. Anxiety causes shallow breathing, which leads to confusion and inability to concentrate. Deep breathing calms and relaxes you.
Read directions carefully and circle any significant words. When you finish a problem, read the directions again to make sure you did what was asked.	Pay attention to any announcements written on the board or made by your instructor. If any directions are unclear, ask your instructor to clarify them. There is nothing worse than getting a bunch of problems wrong because you misread the directions!
For a more difficult problem, read it twice. Write down anything you think of that might help solve the problem: a formula, a picture you draw, etc. If you still can't get it, circle the problem and come back to it later. Do not erase any of the things you wrote down.	If you know even a <i>little</i> bit about the problem, write it down. The answer may come to you as you work on it, or at least you may get partial credit. But don't spend too long on any one problem. Your subconscious mind will work on the tough problem while you go on with the test.
As you work on more difficult problems, watch your "inner voice." You may have negative thoughts going through your mind, such as, "I can't do it," or "I'll flunk, so why try?" or "who cares about this test anyway." In your mind, yell, "STOP" and take several deep, slow breaths. And, replace the negative thought with a positive one.	Here are examples of positive statements . Try writing one of them on the top of your test paper. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know I can do it. • I can do this one step at a time. • I've studied hard, and I'll do the best I can. • This test is a positive challenge for me to show what I've learned.
Show your work. Most math teachers give partial credit if some of the steps in your work are correct, even when the final answer is wrong. Write neatly so your teacher can read it. If you like to scribble when first working on a problem, or checking an answer, do it on scratch paper.	If your teacher can't read your writing, he/she can't give you credit for it. If you need more space to work, ask if you can show your work on additional pieces of paper that you hand in with your test paper. Put your name and the problem numbers on the extra sheets.

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If you still can't solve a difficult problem when you come back to it the <i>second</i> time, make a guess and do not change it . In this situation, your first guess is your best bet. On problems you <i>were</i> able to solve, <i>do not</i> change the answer just because you're a little unsure. Change it <i>only</i> if you find an obvious mistake.	If you are thinking about changing an answer, be sure you can explain to yourself exactly <i>why</i> you are changing it. If you cannot find a specific error, leave your first answer alone. When the tests are returned, check to see if changing answers helped or hurt you.
Check that the answer to a word problem is reasonable and make sense. Read the problem again to make sure you've answered the question.	Use common sense. Can the father really be 7 years old? Would a month's rent be \$32,140? Label your answer: \$, years, inches, etc.
To check for careless errors, you need to rework the problem again, without looking at your previous work . Cover up your work with a piece of scratch paper and pretend you are doing the problem for the first time. Then compare the two answers.	If you just "look over" your work, your mind can easily make the same mistake again without noticing it. Reworking the problem from the beginning forces you to rethink it . If possible, use a different method to solve the problem the second time.
Ignore students who finish early. Use the entire test time. You do <i>not</i> get extra credit for finishing early. Use the extra time to rework problems and correct careless errors.	Students who leave early are often the ones who didn't study or who are too anxious to continue working. If they bother you, sit as far from the door as possible.

Choose your favorite suggestions

Select the suggestions above which seem to describe problems you've had with testing. Which 2 or 3 strategies are you going to use on your next math exam or quiz?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Why are these suggestions Brain Friendly?

Several of the suggestions address anxiety. Reducing your anxiety allows your brain to make the connections between dendrites; in other words, you can think.

Other suggestions remind you that your brain continues to work on difficult problems even if you skip them and go on to the next one. Your subconscious mind will come through for you if you are open to the idea!

Finally, some of the suggestions ask you to use your common sense. Following the directions, being neat, showing your work, and paying attention to whether your answers really make sense are examples of using your common sense to help you.