

# The 10 Steps to Better Test-Taking

## 1: Use a memory data dump.

When you get your test, turn it over and write down the information that you put on your mental cheat sheet. Your mental cheat sheet has now turned into a mental list and writing down this information is not cheating. Do not put your name on the test, do not skim it, just turn it over and write it down those facts, figures and formulas from your mental cheat sheet or other information you may not remember during the test. This is called your first memory data dump. The data dump provides memory cues for test questions.

## 2: Preview the test.

Put your name on the test and start previewing. Look through the entire test to find different types of problems and their point values. Put a mark by the questions that you will solve first.

## 3: Do a second memory dump.

The second data dump is for writing down material that was jarred from your memory while previewing the test. Write this information on the back of the test.

## 4: Develop a test progress schedule.

When you begin setting up a test schedule, determine the point value for each question. You may have some test questions that are worth more points than others.

## 5: Answer the easiest problems first.

Solve, in order, the problems you marked while previewing the test. Then, review the answers to see if they make sense. Start working through the test as fast as you can while being accurate. Answers should be reasonable.

## 6: Do the difficult problems you know how to do.

These are the problems that have quite a few steps and take some time to complete, but are also problems you can complete without any real trouble. These problems are usually worth more points than the rest of the test, so it is important to finish them before you attempt problems that you don't know how to do. By finishing these problems early on in your test time, you can relax, knowing that you already have quite a few points in the bag. This will boost your confidence as you head into the problems you might not know how to do.

## **7: Tackle the toughest problems.**

These are the problems that you might remember a few things about, but you don't know enough to complete them. You might remember the first step, but then draw a blank on what to do next. It is important to begin the problem, even if you know that you cannot complete it. By starting the problem and writing down what you know, you are warming up your brain, which might trigger the "Ah ha!" response. The "Ah Ha!" response is when your brain suddenly remembers how to complete a problem. A memory from your homework or a lecture sometime will pop back into your head right when you need it most. Take some time on these problems, but move on if you are completely stuck.

## **8: Guess at the remaining problems.**

Do as much work as you can on each problem, even if it's just writing the first step. If you cannot write the first step, re-write the problem. Also remember that the way you learn how to solve a problem was by writing, not just looking at the problem. Sometimes rewriting the problem can jar your memory enough to do the first step or the entire problem. If you leave the problem blank, you will get a zero. Do not waste too much time on guessing or trying to work the problems you cannot do.

## **9: Review the test.**

Look for careless errors or other errors you may have made. Students usually lose two to five test points on errors that could have been caught in review. Do not talk yourself out of an answer just because it may not look right. This often happens when an answer does not come out even. It is possible for the answer to be a fraction or a decimal.

## **10: Use all the allowed test time.**

Review each problem by substituting the answer back into the equation or doing the opposite function required to answer the question. If you cannot check the problem in these ways, rework the problem on a separate sheet of paper and compare the answers. Do not leave the classroom unless you have reviewed each problem two times or until the bell rings.

Stapling your scratch paper to the math test when handing it in has several advantages:

- A. If you miscopied the answer from the scratch paper, you will probably get credit for the answers.
- B. If you get the answer incorrect due to a careless error, your work on the scratch paper could give you a few points.
- C. If you do get the problem wrong, it will be easier to locate the errors when the instructor reviews the test. This will prevent you from making the same mistakes on the next math test.