

Preparing for a Math Test

By Barry Wood

How to Review for a Test

1. Start reviewing **in advance** of the class (group) review. (If there is no class review, create a study group to review together.)
2. Plan a definite **study schedule** for review and stick to it. (Be realistic and factor in other classes, work, family, etc.)
3. **Make an outline** of topics that will be on the test and organize your notes, work, and previous tests.
4. **Find out as much as you can** about the upcoming test. Will it include multiple choice, essay, reactions, word problems, and how many?

Watch for clues from the instructor. Ask for old tests. Find out as much as you can before you start studying.

Talk with the instructor at least one week (or two) before the test. Begin your dialogue with the instructor early in the semester.

5. Start early. **The time to start studying for the final is NOW**, on the first day of class.
6. Practice **doing problems in a pressure situation** as part of your homework. Practice in the mode of taking a test.

Create quiz cards. (Take 3 to 5 problems from the homework, odd numbered, and write the problem on the front of the card with the solution on the back. After you have a collection of 10 to 12 cards, shuffle the cards, sit down, set a timer, and take a little quiz.

Also, put in some cards with questions from the last test. Put missed problems and correct solutions on a quiz card. Put problems done in class on a quiz card.

At the end of the semester, trade cards with other people in your study group.

7. At group review, be prepared with questions to ask instructor (or others in the group).
8. Use chapter reviews, self-tests, vocabulary lists (know where, when, how, why it is used), and word problems.
9. **Studying must include:**
 - a. Review of each section of unit: notes, vocabulary words, (their use, definition, ideas), rules, examples, and formulas.
 - b. Practice working problems. Go to instructor's office hours as often as you can.
 - c. Go over homework and quizzes, and write down reminders of good habits and hints.
 - d. Use your quiz cards.
 - e. Reflect on similarities and differences, and possible variations on problems and vocabulary.
 - f. Plan study breaks as your reward for reviewing (i.e. take a 5 or 10 minute walk, watch 10 minutes of favorite video, etc.)

**Statistics show that most people can input and retain info best in a 20 to 30 minute study span, and then they need a break.
 - g. Do weekly surveys in two parts:
 - 1) Careful study of what you're been doing for the previous week, emphasizing the important ideas. Review the class material consistently.
 - 2) Take a broader look at the whole preceding part of the course (1/4, 1/2 way through the course) so you set yourself up early for the final.
10. If you were the instructor, what questions would you ask? Again, watch for the clues (i.e. your instructor says, "I like this problem.")
11. **Get a good night's rest** the night before the test. (Pulling all-nighters with math never works.)

And, it is important to let our unconscious work as we sleep as a part of the learning process. Our brain needs that down time to process.

12. Eat properly. It's hard to concentrate when you are hungry.
13. Allow yourself **plenty of time** to get to the exam, and **arrive early**.
14. Have **time** before and after exam to relax, to be prepared and be undistracted by thinking about where you have to be next. (If you have a class immediately following the exam, inform your instructor that you may be a little late to their class.)
15. Don't study right up to test time. Don't have last minute cram sessions with other students. This can lead to high anxiety. (If you need to have a few study cards to review last minute to bolster your confidence – "Yes! I know this! – that may be fine for you.)

Some people do not talk to other students or socialize at all in the minutes before the test. Whatever is best for you is best.
16. Use your **study cards**: definitions, quizzes, formula on one side, and how, when and where to use it on the other. Be able to talk about how and where it is used.
17. See instructor at least 1 week before the test. It may take more than once or twice to clear the problem that you are having.
18. Study **in a group** but always do your own work.
19. Cram as a last resort.
20. **Don't worry**. If you have done the study and review activities, you will be prepared.

The time to start studying for the final is **now**. Each day. **Every minute of review you do now can save you two minutes before the final.

Taking a test

Arrive early, take a deep breath, relax...

Take 3 breaths and use relaxation techniques.

1. As soon as you are told to begin the exam, jot down (on the back of the test or on scratch paper) any formulas, key ideas or lists that may help you in taking the test so that you can refer to them during the test without worrying about them.
2. Put your name on the test.
3. Do the best job you can. Shoot for 100%.
4. Be serious, but don't worry to the point of anxiety. Fear alone can make you do poorly. Remember: everyone, including the instructor, has anxieties.
5. Have all necessary equipment with you: pencils, books, paper, calculator.
6. Look over the whole test quickly at the start:
 - a. Do the questions you are sure of first.
 - b. Do the problems that you know how to do but that take a little longer.
 - c. Attempt the problems for which you have some idea how to do.
 - d. If you are unable to do a problem: leave it, go to the others, and come back to it later.
 - e. Allot the remaining time between checking our completed work and attempting the problems you are uncertain of.
 - f. Do not attempt to do a bonus problem for 3 points and not check a 10 point test problem.
 - g. Do not spend excessive amount of time on one problem.

7. **Follow the directions.** Underline important words in the directions. (Don't just read and re-read to understand.) If you have a question about the test, ask the instructor.
8. Know how much time you have. Never leave a test early. If you finish early, check your work. Stay calm if others leave before you do.
9. Starting a problem:
 - a. Read it carefully
 - b. Make a drawing that might improve your presentation of the answer.
 - c. Write down specific facts.
 - d. Look at formulas and key ideas. Does it look similar to one you've done before? (Again, don't just sit and read the problem.)
10. Working a Problem:
 - a. Be careful. Show all work carefully, neatly and clearly. Remember – your instructor is not a mind reader.
 - b. Check for accuracy as you go, i.e. sign errors. Read each line backwards.
 - c. Be careful for the first few steps of a solution. Write them out in detail.
 - d. When you finish a problem, re-read the directions again and make sure you've given the answer requested and in the proper format. Can the person correcting the test find your answer and be able to read it?
 - e. If you do have time, re-do the problem. Do not just check it over. Do it on a separate sheet.

It is not uncommon for people to be anxious when they feel they have some stake in their performance.

There is no quick and easy way to learn mathematics. You will need to work hard with diligent, systematic practice.