PREPARATION BEFORE THE TEST

- Preparation for your first test should begin after the first day of class
  - This includes studying, completing homework assignments and reviewing study materials on a regular basis.
  - Budget your time, make sure you have sufficient time to study so that you are well prepared for the test.
  - Go to SIS, and pay attention to hints that the instructor may give about the test. Take careful, neat notes and always ask questions about items you may be confused about.

- Study in small groups
  - Make sure your study group contains students who are serious about studying.
  - Go over as many different problems as you can, such as old homework problems, similar unassigned problems in the course text, and problems on old exams. Don't leave a problem until you're convinced you could do it alone and without the aid of your book.
  - Conjure possible questions you could be asked and answers you might give.
  - Go over any material from the handouts and review the class notes.
  - Repetition is important in math. People learn how to solve problems by doing them, so keep on practice problems, but don't do it blindly. Make sure you learn how to recognize when/why you should use a specific method to solve a problem.
  - Mix up the order of the questions from the various chapters when you are reviewing so you'll learn when to use a specific method/formula.

- Make up a crib sheet.
  - Create it as though you were going to cheat on a closed-book exam. This would include the main ideas and formulas that can be quickly reviewed many times, which will make it easier to retain these key concepts which will be on the test. Try to categorize this material. Flash cards may be used in the same way.

- Don't stay up all night studying. Get at least 8 hours of sleep the night before the exam.

- Set up a backup system for your alarm clock. Set a second alarm, or arrange for a wake-up call from a friend.

- On the day of the test:
  - Be sure to eat. Having food in your stomach will give you energy and help you focus, but avoid heavy foods which can make you groggy.
  - Show up at least 5 minutes before the test will start.
  - Go to the bathroom before walking into the exam room, you don't want to waste time and loose focus by worrying about your human needs during the test.

- Bring everything you need to the exam:
  - paper and several pencils with erasers
  - calculator with extra batteries
o a watch.

TAKING THE TEST

- **Reducing Test Anxiety**
  - Do expect some anxiety. Being concerned will help you do better on a test.
  - Avoid overly worried test-takers. Extreme nervousness, called test anxiety, will interfere with your work. Remember, test anxiety is contagious and unproductive.
  - Keep a positive attitude. Decide to do your best, and don't blame yourself for what you don't know.
  - Concentrate on the test. Don't worry about your ability, the behavior of other people, the number of questions, or even short memory lapses. Pay close attention to one question at a time. This kind of concentration reduces anxiety.
  - *Relax.* Periodically, if you feel too nervous to think or read carefully, try to slow down physically and mentally. To change your mood, put down your pencil, close your eyes and take in several slow, deep breaths. Consciously relax any muscles that you're clenching (jaw, neck, stomach). Then start to work.
  - Remind yourself that you are well-prepared and are going to do well.
  - Don't worry if others finish before you; focus on the test in front of you.

- **Read over the ENTIRE exam before beginning to write anything.**
  - After you've read the exam, write down all the key formulas on the margin of your paper so if you forget them when you're in the middle of the test you can look back at the formula.

- **Be comfortable but alert**
  - Choose a good spot and make sure you have enough room to work, maintain comfortable posture but don't "slouch".
  - Keep your eyes on your own paper, you don't want to appear to be cheating and cause unnecessary trouble for yourself.
  - **Choose the problem or question that seems EASIEST to you and do it first.** You'll feel more confident, and you may also find some helpful ideas for the more difficult questions and continue to do the problems in order of increasing difficulty.
  - **Always read the whole question carefully,** don't make assumptions about what the question might be. Also, look for grammatical clues. They may be in a statement as hints for the correct answer.
  - **Make estimates for your answers.** If you are asked to answer $48 \times 12 = ?$, you could expect a number around 500, but if you end up with an answer around 5000, you'll know you did something wrong.
  - **Leave ample space between your answers.** You may need it for new ideas or additional details when you return later to re-read what you have written.
  - **STAY IN MOTION.** Don't rush but pace yourself, read the entire question and look for keywords. Work on a problem until you get stuck. Think about it for a
minute or two, and if nothing comes to you then drop it and go on to another problem. Don't spend 30 minutes sweating out an additional five points on a problem and run out of time, leaving a 40-point problem untouched. You may later have time to return to the first one and you're much more likely to think of how to do it then.

- **Show your work.** Show all the steps in your work and clearly identify or label your answer so that it can be quickly found. Give enough detail so that both you and the grader can tell what you're trying to do. *Even if you can do the problem in your head, don't.* If you're wrong, you get a zero; if you're right, you could be suspected of cheating.

- **Think partial credit.** Try to put something down for each part of every problem/question. If you don't have time to solve a problem completely, tell what you'd do if you had more time. A guess made with common sense could get you more test points than if you leave an answer blank. Don't be a smart aleck if you guess.

- **Keep your work legible and neat.** If an instructor can't read what you wrote, you are unlikely to get full credit.

- **If you don't understand a question, ask the instructor/proctor for help.** You might get some, and it never hurts to try.

- **Hand in your paper when time is called.** Nothing makes an instructor/proctor more homicidal than having to wrestle you to the floor to get your paper.

### Before You Turn In Your Test

- **If you have time at the end, double check your solutions.** Fight the urge to leave as soon as you have finished. It's natural, but it can hurt your grade. Did you answer each part of every question? Did you answer the question(s) asked? Do your answers look reasonable? Do your calculations check out? (Save this one for last.) Don't change your answers unless you have a good reason to do so. Only change an answer if you misread or misinterpreted the question because the first answer that you put is usually the correct one. If you have time redo the problem on a separate piece of paper and see if you come up with the same answer the second time around. Look for careless mistakes such as making sure the decimal is in the right place, that you copied the numbers correctly, that you put a negative sign if it is needed, that your arithmetic is correct and so on.

- **Put your name on the test paper and answer sheet.**

### AFTER THE TEST

- **Take a few notes on your test-taking skills, you'll be able to perform better on future tests.** Ask yourself:
  - Did I use my time well?
  - What was asked that I didn't expect?
  - How can I predict better for the next test?
  - What part of the test was most difficult? Why?
  - Did test questions come more from readings or from lecture material?
  - What should I do differently in preparing for the next test?
• Credit to Richard M. Felder North Carolina State University and James E. Stice University of Texas at Austin
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