

The 10 Steps to Better Test Taking

Once you begin a test, follow the 10 steps to better test taking below:

Step 1 - Use a memory data dump. Upon receiving 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 it, do not skim it, just turn it over and write down those facts, figures and formulas from your mental cheat sheet or other information you might not remember during the test. This is called your first memory data dump. The data dump provides memory cues for test questions.

Step 2 - Preview the test. Put your name on the test and start previewing. Previewing the test requires you to look through the entire test to find different types of problems and their point values. Put a mark by the questions that you can do without thinking. These are the questions that you will solve first.

Step 3 - Do a second memory data dump. The secondary 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.

Step 4 - Develop a test progress schedule. When you begin setting up a test schedule, determine the point value for each question. You might have some test questions that are worth more points than others.

In some tests, word problems are worth five points and other questions might be worth two or three points. You must decide the best way to get the most points in the least amount of time. This might mean working the questions worth two to three points first and leaving the more difficult word problems for last.

Decide how many problems should be completed half-way through the test. You should have more than half the problems completed by that time.

Step 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.

Clearly write down each step to get partial credit, even if you end up missing the problem. In most math tests, the easier problems are near the beginning of the first page; you need to answer them efficiently and quickly. This will give you both more time for the harder problems and time to review.

Step 6 - Skip difficult problems. If you find a problem that you do not know how to work, read it twice and automatically skip it. Reading it twice will help you understand the problem and put it into your working memory. While you are solving other problems, your mind is still working on that problem.

Difficult problems could be the type of problem you have never seen before or a problem in which you get stuck on the second or third step. In either case, skip the problem and go on to the next one.

Step 7 - Review the skipped problems. When working the skipped problems, think how you have solved other, similar problems as a cue to solving the skipped ones. Also, try to remember how the instructor solved that type of problem on the board.

While reviewing skipped problems, or at any other time, you may have the "Ah, ha!" response. The "Ah, ha!" response is your remembering how to do a skipped problem. Do not wait to finish your current problem. Go to the problem on which you had the "Ah ha" and finish that problem. If you wait to finish your current problem, your "Ah, ha!" response could turn into an "Oh, no!" response.

Step 8 - Guess at the remaining problems Do as much work as you can on each problem, even if it is just writing down the first step. If you cannot write down the first step, rewrite 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.

Step 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 decimal.

Remember: Research reveals that the odds of changing a right answer to a wrong answer are greater than the odds of changing a wrong answer to a right one.

Step 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 by the two ways mentioned, rework the problem on a separate sheet of paper and compare the answers. Do not leave the test room unless you have reviewed each problem two times or until the bell rings.

Remember: There is no prize for handing your test in first, and students who turn their papers in last do make "A's." Handing in your scratch paper may get you extra points or improve your next test score.

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

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

Reference: Paul D. Nolting, Ph.D., *Winning at Math*, 1997 by Academic Success Press, Inc.