

HOW TO TAKE A MATH TEST

A common problem for many students is "freezing up" or "choking" on a test. It may not be so bad that you fail, but you still may end up with a lower grade than you deserve. This 10 step process from *Successful Math Study Skills* by Paul Nolting and William Savage will help you "show what you know."

- ◆ When you get your test, don't even look at it. On a piece of scratch paper or the back of your test, write everything you think you might forget. In particular, write formulas and facts you have memorized. You may also wish to write yourself some reassuring words to calm yourself later in the test. Write only what immediately comes to mind; you can always add to your list later.
- ◆ Read the entire test. Note the types of problems and how the points are distributed. Mark the easy problems.
- ◆ Go back to your list and add any new formulas or facts you thought of while reading the test.
- ◆ Make a schedule. Use the point values to decide approximately how much time should be spent on each part of the test. Even if there is no time limit, you should make a schedule, since the longer you work on a test the more tired and frustrated you may become.
- ◆ Do the easy problems first and check your work. Make sure the answers make sense. For all problems, write neatly and show every step to get the maximum amount of partial credit.
- ◆ Work the rest of the problems, skipping any you are unable to do. It's better to go on if you get stuck than to waste time and get frustrated.
- ◆ Go back to the problems you skipped. Try to remember similar problems you have done or seen, or think of simpler problems like them and solve these. Look at the formulas you have written and see if any apply.

- ◆ Guess at any remaining questions. Never leave anything blank. At least write a formula or explain something in words. Sometimes even rewriting a problem may help you remember the next step.
- ◆ Check for careless mistakes like miscopying answers from your scratch paper or skipping parts of a problem. They may cost you only a few points but why lose even a few?
- ◆ Check your work on all problems. Some problems can be checked with a calculator, or by substituting the answer back in the question. For others, rework the problems from scratch and compare your answers. **WARNING:** many students change answers that were right to begin with. (Ouch!) Do not change your answer unless you can convince yourself the old answer is wrong. Keep reviewing until time is up or you have reviewed every question three times. Turn in all your scratch paper with your name on every page. Remember: there is no reason to turn in your test early. The people who leave early may be turning in empty pages. Above all, remember: **YOU CAN DO IT!**