

How to Succeed in Math

The overriding tip I can give you is that mathematics requires PRACTICE!

1. Do the homework.
 - It's much better to do the homework in about two-hour time blocks. I would recommend you do the homework after each class so that you stay caught up and you are only doing small chunks (like one section) at a time.
 - Your mind actually needs processing time in between “sets” of doing homework for everything to sink in.
 - Think of it like physical exercise—it's much better to work out five days per week for one hour than once per week for five hours. ;) Brainy exercise is the same way!
2. Read the book.
 - I would highly recommend that you read through the section before attending the lecture on it, even if it's confusing. Just read through it once to get some idea of what's happening. Then, when it's covered in class, it will make a lot more sense. You don't need to spend a lot of time on this to soak in every detail in the book. The idea is to have an overview of what's coming.
3. Go to class.
 - This sounds obvious to some people. There is really no substitute for attending class and picking up the extra bits of information that you'll get from the lectures. It's likely the instructor will give you additional strategies that are not found in the book. Also, repetition is key for learning mathematics, so if you come to class, it helps embed the lessons in your head.
4. Be courageous!
 - This is by far the most important success tip I can give you. Math requires courage and persistence. Don't allow yourself to create some negative story about you if you can't get some problems finished. Just pick up the pieces, try again, look back through your notes or examples in the book to see if that can help you. Go get help from a tutor. Form a study group and get help from your peers. Ask questions in class. Trust me, if you have a question, many other students are wondering about the same thing!

Tips for taking Math Exams

1. Keep up with the homework throughout the semester. This is truly the biggest success tip for the exams. Cramming the night before an exam is analogous to running 25 miles the day before you actually run a marathon. You'll just be exhausted for the actual event and not do as well as you could have done! Most of the "training" for a math exam is done in the weeks prior to the exam, with the homework.
2. Do the exam review problems given to you by your instructor within three days preceding the exam to refresh your skills.
3. Get a good night's sleep before an exam to make sure you are well-rested and ready to think.
4. When you get the exam, skim through the entire test FIRST.
 - Do the problems that seem easiest to you. This makes sure you get those points on your exam score, and it also boosts your emotional feelings and confidence about the test.
 - Then go through and do the medium-level problems.
 - Save the hardest problems for the end.
 - Know yourself! In other words, if you tend to second-guess yourself and change correct answers to incorrect answers, then don't look at the problems after you've finished. On the other hand, if you tend to have mental "aha" moments after you've struggled a bit, then go back through the exam a second or third time to make sure you sufficiently checked your work.
 - If you get frustrated and you find that your mind is going crazy with negative thoughts, take a deep breath and force yourself to replace those thoughts with something positive. Be prepared for this when you enter the exam room. In other words, have a positive affirmation already memorized to fall back on, in case you fall into negative thinking. Some of my past students have even imbued their positive thoughts into some sort of artistic symbol, like a rainbow or funny face, that they can draw quickly. As soon as they get the exam, they draw that symbol on their test and go back to the symbol for positive reinforcement whenever necessary during the exam. (Besides being helpful for them, it makes grading the exams entertaining to see the various symbols drawn on the tests.)
5. Finally, keep in mind that it's just an exam, not a statement about your worth as a human being.