

Test Taking Errors to Avoid

1. Misread the directions.

Causes:

- Failure to read directions.
- Ignoring the directions.
- Not reading the directions carefully.
- Not understanding the directions.

To avoid these errors:

- Read **all** directions on the test carefully.
- Follow the directions after you have read them.
- When doing homework and practice tests, note the directions (ie. "solve," "simplify," "evaluate," "factor," etc.) and know the procedures that these directions are asking you to do.

2. Careless errors.

Causes:

- Lack of focus on what you are doing.
- Becoming tired or distracted.
- Sloppy handwriting.
- Disorganized presentation of work.

To avoid these errors:

- Don't rush through an answer.
- Look for sign errors.
- Look for arithmetic errors.
- Do work in a neat, organized fashion.
- Check all your work!

3. Concept errors.

Causes:

- Not understanding how to do a problem.
- Not fully understanding the concepts and principles behind a problem.

- Lack of practice in working similar problems.
- Failure to attend class, take notes or do homework regularly.

To avoid these errors:

- Learn all the material well before the test.
- Study examples from the textbook, class notes and homework.
- Take all practice tests in the textbook and from your instructor.
- Create your own practice test.

4. **Application errors.**

Causes:

- You know the concept, but cannot fully apply it to a problem.
- Lack of practice in applying the concepts before the test.

To avoid these errors:

- Practice all types of application (word) problems before the test.
- Memorize methods for specific applications (for example, mixture problems).
- Use your self-confidence and intuition to apply concepts in a new way.

5. **Test-taking errors.**

Causes:

- Bad test-taking habits.
- Inefficient use of time on a test.
- Not completing a problem to the last step.
- Doubting yourself and changing correct answers to incorrect answers.
- Spending too much time on one problem.
- Rushing through the test.
- Miscopying the question or steps in your work.
- Leaving answers blank.
- Calculator errors.
- Leaving a test early.

To avoid these errors:

- Review the test at first decide about how much time to devote to each question.

- Complete the entire problem and answer the question being asked.
- Proceed through the test in a methodical way, at a steady pace.
- Check all your work for correctness in copying questions and steps.
- Work all problems as much as you can.
- Be careful how you input numbers and operations into your calculator.
- Stay in the classroom until the end of the test; check your answers again if you have extra time.

6. Study errors.

Causes:

- Uncertainty on what concepts and skills the test will assess.
- Not spending enough time studying, learning and practicing the material.
- Not practicing checking your answers.

To avoid these errors:

- Know on what material you will be tested.
- Overstudy the material.
- Do all available practice tests beforehand.

(adopted from *Winning At Math* by Paul Nolting.)