

## Test-Taking Strategies

Written tests are major assessments in your math course and represent a large portion of your final mark. To get the highest mark possible, you want not only to prepare for a test properly (see **BLM SS-6 Preparing for a Test**), but also to complete the test to your advantage.

### *Group Activity*

1. Take out a copy of your last test and a copy of the corrected test (or marking scheme). Look closely at each question. Why did you score full marks on some questions? Why did you not score full marks on other questions? With your group, share what on your test you did well and what you could have done better.
2. Review the following list of potential test errors. Share with your group which errors you think happen most often to you.
  - I did not read the directions properly.
  - I made a silly mistake. (For  $3^2$ , I wrote 6, but it should be 9.)
  - I wasn't sure which formula to use.
  - I ran out of time.
  - I did not check over my work.
  - I didn't remember having been taught something.
  - I had no idea what this question was asking, so I left it blank.
  - I had trouble reading my own writing.
3. On a piece of paper, write down each type of error from step 2. Discuss them with your group and brainstorm ideas about how you think each error can be avoided in the future. Record your group's ideas on the piece of paper.
4. Read the following steps for being successful on a math test, and visualize yourself completing each step the next time you have a test.
  - **Write neatly and completely** – You can lose marks if the teacher cannot read what you have written. Also, if you misread your own writing, it may lead to errors. Avoid skipping steps and remember to show all steps of a solution in order to maximize part marks.
  - **Do a memory dump** – Are there formulas, rules, etc., that you need to write down quickly before you forget them? You may want to record them even before you begin the first question on the test.
  - **Preview the test** – Write your name on the test, make sure you have all the pages, and quickly look at each question.
  - **Do a second memory dump** – After looking at each question, identify other important formulas, rules, etc. that you need in order to complete the solutions.
  - **Complete the easy questions** – Determine which questions you can do immediately and complete them first.
  - **Relax and be positive** – If you experience nervousness or anxiety, breathe deeply and complete a 30-second meditation (see **BLM SS-4 Reducing Math Anxiety and Stress**).
  - **Schedule the rest of your time** – Decide the best way to get the most marks and the order in which you will do the more difficult questions.
  - **Deal with difficult questions** – Read each of these questions at least twice, and set a time limit for solving them. Highlight key words.



- **Correct errors** – Don't waste too much time erasing. It is sometimes easier to put an X through your incorrect work and write a new solution on a clean piece of paper (or on the back of the test).
- **Review incomplete questions** – Try to recall other related information that may help you with questions you have left partially blank. Don't be shy about asking the teacher for extra clarification.
- **Fill in all blanks** – Maximize your marks by leaving nothing blank. Provide an educated guess if necessary. However, check with your teacher beforehand about the marking scheme for the test. Certain tests, such as some multiple choice tests, are set up so that you lose marks for incorrect answers, in which case it is better not to make a guess.
- **Review entire test** – Reread the instructions for all questions, making sure you have answered all parts of the question, while checking for careless mistakes. Check to see if your answers make sense by estimating, checking units of measure, using logic, etc.
- **Use up all of the time** – Don't worry if others finish before you. This is *your* test. If you have extra time, redo questions on a separate piece of paper and see if you get the same answers. This method reveals careless errors that you may not spot when simply reviewing your written work.

