Subject Specific Study & Test Writing Strategies

Focus: Mathematics

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Repetition is important in math. You learn how to solve problems by doing them. Make sure you learn how to recognize when/why you should use a specific method to solve a problem.

Work on practice problems for each topic ranging in levels of difficulty.

When practicing, try to solve the problem on your own first then look at the answer or seek help if you are having a problem.

Mix up the order of the questions from various topics when you are reviewing so you’ll learn when to use a specific method/formula.

Make up a sheet with all the formulas you need to know and memorize all the formulas on the sheet.
Math Exam Writing Strategies

Begin answering questions that you know right away. This will build your confidence and help you focus your time and energy on the tough ones later.

Before you start a question, try to estimate what you think the answer might be. Even a rough estimate will help you double-check yourself after you arrive at your answer.

Show all your work (especially when partial credit is awarded) and write as legibly as possible.

Even if you know the final answer is wrong, don’t erase your work because you may get partial credit for using the correct procedure.
Math Exam Writing Strategies

- If a problem involves multiplication, check your work by division; add, then subtract; factor, then multiply; find the square root, then the square; differentiate, then integrate.

- Check over your exam after you are done. If you have time, redo the problems and see if you come up with the same answers the second time around.

- Look for careless mistakes such as making sure the decimal is in the right place, that you copied the numbers correctly, that you put a negative sign if it is needed, and that your math is correct.
Calculator Tips

• Always have new batteries in your calculator for exams.

• Just because your calculator is permitted on the exam, it doesn’t mean you should go calculator crazy.

• Calculators can certainly be helpful on some problems, but on others using a calculator might actually take more time than working the problem out by hand.

• If a fraction problem gives you all answers in fraction, not decimal form, you should not use your calculator. This applies to radicals. There is no reason to use a calculator when you are dealing with variables.

• You should only use your calculator when you have a definite operation you want to perform. You should not reach for your calculator instinctively any time you run into trouble.
Resources

- IB Prepared: Mathematics Book Series, IBO
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- University of Illinois website, http://www.uic.edu/depts/ace/math_tips.shtml