Study suggestions for exams

Math 1241, Fall 2012

We want you to succeed in this course. However, given the many complicated concepts of the course, mastery will require a large investment of effort and time. Set a high standard for yourself but don't get discouraged if it doesn't come easy at first. We're committed to help you struggle through and reach your goals for this course.

Here are 10 points to guide your preparations for exams.

1. Read the assigned textbook sections.

   The textbook will give you a good background and more details than we can communicate in class. Take advantage of it.

2. Read the assigned Math Insight pages.

   Many of these pages closely match what we covered in lecture. Being written locally, they reflect our own perspective.

3. Review notes you wrote from lecture and discussion.

   If you don't understand something that was covered, ask another student, a teaching assistant, or the lecturer. Don't fret in isolation. Let one of us help you turn your fretting into constructive learning.

4. Work on assigned homework problems.

   Even if you thought something made sense in lecture or discussion, you should be skeptical that you really understand it until you've successfully worked through related problems.

   Don't be fooled by looking at a solution and thinking the problem is simple enough. If you haven't struggled through a problem without knowing the answer first, you haven't done yourself justice.

5. Work on or review the group projects.

   If you relied heavily on other group members, go back to the beginning and try to work through it yourself. Make sure you understand all the steps.

   If you still don't understand how to complete them, ask other students, your teaching assistants, and your instructor.

6. Go to office hours.

   Don't wait for a crisis before coming to office hours. Come by to clarify points you don't understand, get pointers on what to study, discuss your particular interest in the course material, or make suggestions about the course.

7. Review the study guide for the exam.

   Identify the parts you don't understand and focus on being prepared for anything that might be on an exam.

8. Take a practice test.

   Try to emulate a testing situation as best as you can. Pick a sample of 4-6 of the practice problems (not the first 4-6, but skip around when picking problems). Don't allow yourself to look at a solution and spend 50 uninterrupted minutes attempting to solve as many of them as you can. Afterwards, look at the solutions and grade yourself.

   If you start this early enough, you will have time to go over the material you had trouble with and give your self a second practice test with a different selection of problems.

9. Get help early.

   If you are stuck, spending time banging your head against the wall will not lead to more insight. Go to office hours, ask a teaching assistant or an instructor before or after class, make an appointment to see them at a different time. Find help at the SMART Learning Commons (`smart.umn.edu`). Get a list of private tutors-for-hire by sending email to: `ugrad@math.umn.edu`.

10. Go to office hours.

    This can't be stressed too much. We're here to help. We can help more the sooner you come.