**TAKING MATH, SCIENCE OR ENGINEERING EXAMS**

- Read over the entire exam before writing anything.

- **Choose the problem or question that seems easiest to you. Do it first.** Continue to do the problems in order of increasing difficulty.

- **STAY IN MOTION!!!** Work on one problem until you get stuck. Think about it for a minute, and if nothing comes to you, drop it and go on to another problem. *Don’t spend 30 minutes sweating out an additional five points on a problem and run out of time, leaving a 40-point problem untouched.* Later, you may have time to return to the first one and you’re much more likely to think of how to do it then.

- **Show your work.** Give enough detail so that both you and the grader can tell what you’re trying to do. *Even if you can do the problem in your head, don’t.* If you’re wrong and you didn’t write down your work, you earn zero credit; if you’re right but didn’t show your work, you could be suspected of cheating.

- **Watch out for significant figures.** Some instructors don’t appreciate answers like 23.694028, even if that’s what the calculator says.

- **Think partial credit.** Put something down for each part of every problem. If you don’t have time to solve it completely, tell what you’d do if you had more time.

- **Keep your work legible.** If an instructor can’t read what you wrote, you aren’t likely to get full credit and you may not get any at all.

- **Don’t panic.** If you get sweaty or start hyperventilating, put down your pencil, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and consciously relax any muscles that you’re clenching (jaw, neck, stomach). When you’re calmer, go back to work. Even if you see other students handing their exams in early, remember that you are entitled to the full time allotment to complete and check your exam.

- **Check your solutions.** Save this one for last. Did you answer each part of every question? Did you answer the question(s) asked? Do your answers look reasonable? Do your calculations check out?

Adapted from: Richard M. Felder, North Carolina State University; James E. Stice, University of Texas at Austin. Courtesy of Adina Glickman, Stanford University

---

USC Viterbi
Academic Resource Center

viterbi.usc.edu/varc | viterbi.varc@usc.edu
213.740.3881 | Ronald Tutor Hall 211