

Absolutely!

For whatever reason, a lot of kids think that you can't study for a math test. I think it comes from their recognition that math tests feel different from tests in other classes. They feel different because tests in other classes up to this point of your educational journey are usually about *knowing* something while math tests tend to be about *doing* something. Since that's true, you definitely can't study for math tests *in the same way* that you study for tests in other classes ... but you absolutely *can* study. Here's how:

(By the way, it's going to take me a while to explain all of this to you ... but that's OK. As a matter of fact, reading through all of this is a lot like preparing for a test: if you want to do it right, it's going to take some time.)

First of all, since math tests tend to be about *doing* something, let's use the word *practicing* instead of *studying*. It's comparable to being on a basketball team. You practice your basketball skills to get ready for a basketball game just like you practice your math skills to get ready for a math test. And because you wouldn't expect to win a basketball game if you showed up without practicing, you shouldn't expect to do well on a math test without practicing that either. If you want to be good, you don't sit and watch the coach (or teacher) demonstrate the skill at practice and say, "I'll be able to do that when it's game (or test) time." No, you practice every day if you want to be good.

Doing well on a math test involves working during three different time periods, or stages; you need to work hard in all three stages to be successful. They are

Stage One: Get the proper amount of practice on the homework leading up to the test.

Stage Two: Review and practice material on the day before the test.

Stage Three: Do your best work during the test.

Before we move on, let me make sure you see why all three are important. If you don't do any homework (Stage One), then working the night before (Stage Two) on concepts that you were supposed to be practicing for the last ten days will be tough. If you do well on your homework (Stage One), but don't review the night before a test (Stage Two), you may no longer remember how to do on the test what you were good at a few days ago. And if you work well on your homework (Stage One) and review it all the night before the test (Stage Two), what good does it do you to blow through the test so quickly that you make silly mistakes on problems that you knew how to solve?

So that you can see how effective your practice has been, I have a little checklist of things you should be doing (or not doing) during each of the three stages. Next to each one, I've provided a way for you to mark whether your actions regarding each item on the checklist made your performance level go up (↑) or down (↓). As a trial, respond to each one of these questions with our last math chapter in mind. This exercise is just for your own benefit, so be honest. Your answers might give you a good idea of what you might be able to fix for next time.

Stage One: The Days Leading Up to the Test

You had several homework assignments during the chapter, and time to work on them before you left class each day. While doing any of these assignments, did you ...

↑ ↓ ... ask Rice any questions during homework time?

↑ ↓ ... ask Rice any questions during homeroom?

↑ ↓ ... misuse your homework and homeroom time and then realize you had questions when you got home?

↑ ↓ ... get so much help from someone outside of class that you were really more of a spectator?

↑ ↓ ... copy down answers from the back of the book without doing the problems?

↑ ↓ ... leave an entire section of an assignment undone?

↑ ↓ ... put yourself in a situation where you had to do the assignment on the bus or in another class?

Every day that homework is due, Rice opens the class by taking questions on the assignment. During that time, did you ...

↑ ↓ ... ask Rice any questions?

↑ ↓ ... check your work when other people asked questions to see if your work agreed with what Rice said?

↑ ↓ ... watch Rice's explanations to learn the procedure or just listen for 'the answer'?

As homework was returned to you, did you ...

↑ ↓ ... get a homework grade that was lower than six out of ten?

↑ ↓ ... correct your homework for the notebook quiz?

Stage Two: The Day Before the Test

On the day before a test, Rice gives out a sheet of answers to review problems. Did you ...

↑ ↓ ... use your time wisely during the review period?

↑ ↓ ... do all the problems on the review sheet (either in class or at home)?

↑ ↓ ... go back and rework any problems you missed?

↑ ↓ ... get more examples from the textbook on any section where you missed a lot of problems?

↑ ↓ ... bring your textbook home to study?

If you finished the review, you might have looked for other sources of practice. Did you review ...

↑ ↓ ... the problems on the Chapter Quiz?

↑ ↓ ... your XODs?

↑ ↓ ... the problems Rice graded on your homework from the chapter?

↑ ↓ ... the materials on the textbook website?

↑ ↓ ... any topics from lessons that did not come from the textbook?

↑ ↓ ... (and memorize) any important formulas from the chapter?

↑ ↓ ... any items that Rice specifically hinted to watch out for on the test?

↑ ↓ ... the associated material on the Java Jukebox?

Stage Three: During the Test

During the test, did you ...

↑ ↓ ... try to do too much in your head?

↑ ↓ ... rework problems to check your answers?

↑ ↓ ... use a second method to do or check any of your answers?

↑ ↓ ... leave any answers blank or write something that had no chance of being correct?

↑ ↓ ... turn it in before most of the rest of class did?

Sometimes when a test doesn't go well, a lot of kids blame it on a "bad day." That could be true; however, as you've seen above, it could also have been the result of a bad night or a bad week. And while it's a rare middle school student who will be able to mark the up arrow on every question above, this list should give you a place to start if you want to improve your performance. If you have any questions about any of this, please let me know. And good luck ~~studying~~ practicing!