

Study Skills in Action

Avoiding Test-Taking Errors

For some students, the day they get their math tests back is just as nerve-racking as the day they take the test. Do you look at your grade, sigh hopelessly, and stuff the test in your book bag? This kind of response is not going to help you to do better on the next test. When professional football players lose a game, the coach does not let them just forget about it. They review all their mistakes and discuss how to correct them. That is what you need to do with every math test.

There are six types of test errors, as listed below. Look at your test and see what types of errors you make. Then decide what you can do to avoid making them again. Many students need to do this with a tutor or instructor the first time through.

Smart Study Strategy

Analyze Your Errors

Type of error

- 1 ► **Misreading Directions:** You do not correctly read or understand directions.
- 2 ► **Careless Errors:** You understand how to do a problem but make careless errors, such as not carrying a sign, miscopying numbers, and so on.
- 3 ► **Concept Errors:** You do not understand how to apply the properties and rules needed to solve a problem.
- 4 ► **Application Errors:** You can do numerical problems that are similar to your homework problems but struggle with problems that vary, such as application problems.
- 5 ► **Test-Taking Errors:** You hurry too much, do not use all of the allowed time, spend too much time on one problem, and so on.
- 6 ► **Study Errors:** You do not study the right material or do not learn it well enough to remember it on a test without resources such as notes.

Corrective action

- Read the instructions in the textbook exercises at least twice and make sure you understand what they mean. Make this a habit in time for the next test.
- Pace yourself during a test to avoid hurrying. Also, make sure you write down every step of the solution neatly. Use a finger to move from one step to the next, looking for errors.
- Find a tutor who will work with you on the next chapter. Visit the instructor to make sure you understand the math.
- Do not just mimic the steps of solving an application problem. Explain out loud why you are doing each step. Ask the instructor or tutor for different types of problems.
- Refer to the *Ten Steps for Test-Taking* on page 345.
- Take a practice test. Work with a study group. Confer with your instructor. Do not try to learn a whole chapter's worth of material in one night—cramming does not work in math!