

Test-Taking Strategies
compiled by Sheila Kannappan, UNC Chapel Hill Physics & Astronomy

General Strategies

1. Get sleep.
2. Remember everyone has self-doubt – if you think you’re an impostor, google “impostor syndrome” and you’ll find out lots of other people do too! Take time for ritual value-affirmation* immediately before the test.
3. Know the rubric/grading style of your grader as well as the relative importance of the test.
4. Read all problems and go for the easiest ones first (based on ALL parts).
5. Watch the time – leave problems that are taking too long and return later if time permits.
6. Don’t write contradictory information.
7. Do write generic equations that you believe to be needed for the solution.
8. A wrong answer is better than a blank answer.
9. Practice performing under pressure to take control of your stress and use it for focus. (google & read Bronson & Merryman, New York Times, 2/6/2013 – quite literally, stress can *improve* your performance if you harness it)

* Value-affirmation: Multiple studies have shown that if you take a few minutes before a test to write down or silently recite to yourself what your values are (e.g., being there for friends and family, contributing to human knowledge, taking a stand for social justice, etc.), this will “bring you back to yourself” and can result in dramatic improvement (tens of percents) in test scores.

GRE Advice

- Studying will increase your scores a LOT (both General & Physics exams)
- Tips from a GRE physics question-writer:
http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/cosmicvariance/2009/10/22/an-inside-look-at-the-physics-gre/#.Vf4Zs_lVikp
- Flash cards in SPS room, free practice exams and study tips online:
http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/
<http://www.ets.org/gre/subject/about/content/physics>
- Focus on the Verbal & Quantitative tests, not the Writing test
- WATCH OUT: big gap between Oct/Nov & April test dates for Physics test – consider an extra, early test in the spring of your junior year if you can afford it
- Even if you score low, you can still get into schools that require the Physics GRE if your grades & research are strong