Welcome and friendly advice

Welcome to Math 231!

Although every student learns material in their own way, we would like to share some advice (based on many years of experience teaching calculus).

• Your professors tend to stress things which they think are important. If your professor spends a lot of time with a particular sort of problem in class or on the homework, then you should expect to see similar problems on the exams.

• On the same theme, there is no substitute for attending class.

• Read the book, and compare the material there with your notes from class, so you can see which topics have been stressed. Make notes of things which you do not understand, so that you can clear them up later.

• Do lots of problems. Math is not a spectator sport. We have been doing calculus for decades, so a problem may look easy when we do it. But you have to struggle with the material (as we did a long time ago) in order to understand it yourself.

• Use the resources which you find helpful. Talk with other students. Talk to your TA. Form study groups in your dorms. Visit the tutoring room.

• At some point, everyone will be stuck on a problem – this is a fact of mathematics. What can you do? The only real mistake you can make is to do nothing – there are lots of possible good suggestions.
  • Write down what you know and what you want to know--it is crucial to know what the goal of the problem is.
  • Try to figure out which material from class and the text is relevant. Often times it is easiest to rule out things which are not relevant.
  • Does this remind you of a problem you have done before? Would those techniques be helpful?
  • Talk to a friend. Talking out loud about a problem, even if you are confused, helps you to understand your own thinking.
  • Be honest with yourself about what you know is true and what you think might be true.
  • Be honest with yourself about parts of the question which you don't understand.
  • If you are really getting nowhere, take a break and work on something else.
  • Develop your own strategies--everyone is different.

• Check out the "brief tour of Math 231" from the video library (Math 231 channel).

Again, welcome to Math 231. We look forward to a productive semester!