Tips for Studying Mathematics

Many students find mathematics courses more challenging than many of their other courses, even at the introductory level. And, many students feel that their scores on homework, quizzes and exams do not reflect their understanding of mathematics, or their competency. It doesn’t have to be like this, so I’ve listed some simple suggestions for improving your understanding, competency and overall learning experience in this, and any other math class.

- Set aside one to two hours each day for studying. Do not try to cram all of your studying into one or two marathon sessions a week.
- Read the relevant sections in the text, (and the relevant supplements), once before the lecture(s). This initial reading need not be in depth, but you should familiarize yourself with any new definitions and terminology, and you should make a brief list of the concepts and examples which you find confusing.
- Rewrite your notes from class on the same day that you took them.
- Read the relevant sections and supplements again after the lecture. This reading should be more in depth. In particular, you should follow the examples in the text with paper and pencil (or pen). I.e., try to work the examples yourself, referring to the text when you are stuck.
- Do the homework problems for each section as soon as the section has been covered, (or before).
- Use the review questions (on the review page) as a progress guide. You should start working on them as soon as the relevant material has been covered. Do not wait until just before exams to look at them.
- Study in small groups. Find 2 or 3 people in class with whom you can study on a regular basis. You can work on homework together, quiz each other, etc. Take turns explaining the examples from class, the text and the supplements to each other.
- Use all of the resources: Go to all the lectures; go to section each week, visit your TA and/or me during office hours to get extra help; go to MSI. Don’t wait until just before an exam to get help.
- Practice, practice, practice... There is no magical secret to learning math. The more you work at it, the better you do.

Remember: The best way to learn math (or anything else) is by doing. Your technical proficiency will improve dramatically the more you practice. And, as your technical proficiency improves, so will your understanding.