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MEMO

TO: Students who have been disappointed with their test grades

FROM: Richard M. Felder, North Carolina State University

Dear Student,

Many of you have told your instructor that you understood the course material much better than your last test grade showed, and some of you asked what you should do to keep the same thing from happening on the next test.

Let me ask you some questions about how you prepared for the test. Answer them as honestly as you can. If you answer "No" to many of them, your disappointing test grade should not be too surprising. If there are still a lot of "No"s after the next test, your disappointing grade on that test should be even less surprising. If your answer to most of these questions is "Yes" and you still got a poor grade, something else must be going on. It might be a good idea for you to meet with your instructor or a counselor to see if you can figure out what it is.

You'll notice that several of the questions presume that you're working with classmates on the homework--either comparing solutions you first obtained individually or actually getting together to work out the solutions. Either approach is fine. In fact, if you've been working entirely by yourself and your test grades are unsatisfactory, I would strongly encourage you to find one or two homework and study partners to work with before the next test. (Be careful about the second approach, however; if what you're doing is mainly watching others work out solutions you're probably doing yourself more harm than good.)

The question "How should I prepare for the test" becomes easy once you've filled out the checklist. The answer is...

Do whatever it takes to be able to answer 'Yes' to most of the questions.

Good luck,
Richard Felder

Test Preparation Checklist

Answer "Yes" only if you *usually* did the things described (as opposed to occasionally or never).

Homework

- Yes No 1. Did you make a serious effort to understand the text? (Just hunting for relevant worked-out examples doesn't count.)
- Yes No 2. Did you work with classmates on homework problems, or at least check your solutions with others?
- Yes No 3. Did you attempt to outline every homework problem solution before working with classmates?
- Yes No 4. Did you participate actively in homework group discussions (contributing ideas, asking questions)?
- Yes No 5. Did you consult with the instructor or teaching assistants when you were having trouble with something?
- Yes No 6. Did you understand ALL of your homework problem solutions when they were handed in?
- Yes No 7. Did you ask in class for explanations of homework problem solutions that weren't clear to you?

Test preparation

- Yes No 8. If you had a study guide, did you carefully go through it before the test and convince yourself that you could do everything on it?
- Yes No 9. Did you attempt to outline lots of problem solutions quickly, without spending time on the algebra and calculations?
- Yes No 10. Did you go over the study guide and problems with classmates and quiz one another?
- Yes No 11. If there was a review session before the test, did you attend it and ask questions about anything you weren't sure about?
- Yes No 12. Did you get a reasonable night's sleep before the test? (If your answer is no, your answers to 1-11 may not matter.)

Yes No ***TOTAL***

The more "Yes" responses you recorded, the better your preparation for the test. If you recorded two or more "No" responses, think seriously about making some changes in how you prepare for the next test.