How to Succeed in Math by Really Trying

Here are some general principles for succeeding in math courses.

(1) **Pay attention in class**
Many students think they can succeed in a math course by copying from the board and doing the homework problems. This is a failing strategy. Students need to understand the material on which the homework problems are based.

(2) **Do all the homework problems**
A good idea is to review the material covered in class before you attempt to do the homework. This may take more time than you usually allocate to your math homework. A good rule of thumb for time management in college is that in each course you should expect to spend at least 2 hours studying outside of class for each hour you spend in class.

(3) **Get good at asking questions in class**
Learn the material well enough to be able to formulate a question clearly. Avoid saying things such as: “I don't understand this at all.” When an instructor hears such a statement, the instructor has no information about the source of your confusion and will probably just repeat the explanation she has already given that you already have not understood. It is also likely true that the answer to any question that you can formulate will be useful to others in the class.

(4) **Get copies of old exams**
Work problems from old exams slowly until you consistently get the right answers. Show the completed exams to students, TAs and instructors.

(5) **Avoid the dark side**
Almost without exception cheating does not lead to higher grades. You might be able to squeak through one problem here or there but pretty soon you will be in the middle of material that depends on material previously covered. Cheating is high risk and no reward.

(6) **Spend time on math!**
Just as you would need to practice a new language or musical instrument, you need to put in the time necessary to learn mathematics! Your efforts will pay off if you follow these suggestions.