Notes on Assignments and Exam Taking Skills

For Homework Specifically:
-Make sure you use all your resources to their fullest. Remember that you can go to your professor, the chemistry department tutors, and your classmates for help.

-Your textbook is one of the best resources. You can frequently find examples in the text that are similar to your homework problems.

-Also use the end of chapter problems as a resource to help with the graded problems. Your solutions manual has complete solutions for all of the questions with a bold number in the text. The answers for these same problems are in the back of the book. You can often find a problem that is similar to the one on your homework which is solved in the solutions manual. You can then use a comparison between the problems to help you do the one that you don’t have a solution for.

-It is a good idea to recopy your homework before turning it in. In addition to making it neater and easier to grade, this is an excellent way for you to catch careless errors, and in thinking about how to lay out the problems logically, you will also have to think again about how you solved a problem, so this can really help solidify your understanding, too.

For Exams Specifically:
-For this class, you should never skip a multiple choice question. You will only get points for correct answers. You will not lose points for incorrect answers, so it is to your advantage to make a random guess rather than skip the question.

-You will receive partial credit for incorrect multiple choice answers that are based on some logic even though they are not fully correct. This makes guessing, especially an educated guess, even more beneficial. Note, though, that partial credit on multiple choice questions is at the instructor’s discretion. Only some answers on some questions will merit partial credit.

-Try to budget your time carefully. Do the problems that you definitely know how to do first and then work your way towards the ones that are harder and harder. That way you will not run out of time with one easy question remaining! Have a general idea of how long you can afford to spend on a question before you need to move on to the next one, and try to stick roughly on schedule. This will help you to not run out of time. Another possible approach is to read through the whole exam quickly and jot down ideas of how to do the different problems and then to go back and work out the problems properly. This would ensure that you’ve written down something for each problem in case you run out of time.

-Frequently one question in an exam will contain information that may be useful to you somewhere else. For example, a compound might be referred to by name in one place but by formula somewhere else, or a formula may be given somewhere that allows you to work out the charge on a polyatomic ion that you may have forgotten.

-It is frequently possible to eliminate one or more multiple choice answers based on logic alone. Also, be alert to the terms all, none, are, are not, etc. in multiple choice questions.
For Both Exams and Homework:
- If you find yourself totally stumped, do not just leave the question blank. Can you think of any equations that you’ve used in the past or other calculations that you’ve done in the past that used the type of information you’re given? Even if they might not be the correct way to solve the current problem, there’s a good chance that they might have something to do with it. When in doubt, write down anything that you can think of that might be relevant. That way you can at least get some partial credit. If you leave a question totally blank, then there’s no chance of any credit at all. Don’t worry about whether the teacher will laugh at your answer; you never know when what you think is totally wrong may actually turn out to be on the right track.

- It is common on both exams and homework to ask a question that is based on the answer to the question before it. If you know how to do this question, but you weren’t able to get the answer that you need from the previous problem, then make up a number to use. If you do the question correctly, but start with the incorrect number (since you made it up) you will get credit for knowing how to do the problem. Just write something on the paper like, “I don’t know how to do part a., so I’ll assume the answer is XXX so that I can use it in part b.”

- Always check all of your work as thoroughly as possible. On your homework you can do this when you recopy your answers. Actually plug your numbers into the calculator a second time as well as checking that all the units work out and that the answers are sensible. On exams, time is often more limited, but you should at least look over each answer and make sure that the units and the numerical answer make sense. If you get an answer that does not make sense to you but you can’t figure out why it’s wrong, you should note this on the paper and say why it doesn’t make sense. You will usually get some credit for noticing that what you’ve got is incorrect. An example would be if you calculate a percentage that’s greater than 100% - this is not possible, so the calculation must be incorrect.

- If you have some incorrect calculations and some correct ones on your page, then try to make it clear which calculations you actually intend to be counted as part of your answers. Cross out anything that you don’t want graded. Also, circle your final answer. In multistep problems, it is also a good idea to include a sentence or two as you do the problem to explain your reasoning or what you’re doing at each step. This will help to show that you know what you’re doing and will explain anything that, just from the numbers, looks like a jump in logic.

- When you have completed a problem, always go back and reread the answer to be sure you have actually answered the question that was asked and that you have not missed a part of the question. Missing parts of questions or not answering the question that was asked are both really good ways to lose a lot of points by being careless that you could have gotten if you read the problem more carefully.