

# MATH ANXIETY

Math anxiety is a term that describes fear and negative attitudes about working with numbers and taking math tests. If this sounds like you, you're not alone! Here are some suggestions to help alleviate anxiety:

- Motivate yourself to learn math. As Barbie once said, "Math class is hard," but it also has many rewards. Mathematics is a useful tool with a wide range of applications in nearly every field, as well as everyday life.
- Don't try to skip ahead to a higher class. Math is sequential, which means all material learned will be used for later material. Take the proper sequence.
- If you take a math class in summer, remember that there will be a lot of material (16 weeks worth) covered in a short period of time (6 or 11 weeks) and you will have to devote about twice as much time or more per week to keep up.
- Don't take a semester off between math classes (except possibly summer). You may forget a lot of material and have a hard time keeping up when you start again.
- Talk to your department about which math classes are allowed for your major. They will have the most up-to-date information. Then talk to the math department about which courses and instructors are best suited for your needs and abilities. For example, many majors allow College Mathematics (MATH 1332) or Elementary Statistics (MATH 1342) instead of College Algebra (MATH 1314).
- Talk to your instructor about your anxiety. He or she may have suggestions, or be able to help in ways such as not calling on you in class or allowing more time on tests.
- Go to class every day! Research shows a strong correlation between attendance and math grades. Things will always come up (work, kids, illness, etc. . .), but attending class should be a high priority.
- Make the most of your class time. Warm up for class by looking over the previous day's notes and homework. Write out any questions you have. If possible, read ahead in the text. Be alert and attentive. You won't get much benefit out of sleeping through class.
- Ask questions in class. If you just decide you can figure something out later, you may not understand the rest of the lecture and fall further behind. Most often, others will have the same question. If they don't, tough!
- Sit toward the front and center of the room. This way you will hear and see better, get more of your instructor's attention, and stay more alert.

- Develop a note-taking system or tape-record class. If you are too busy writing every word the instructor says, you will not have time to comprehend much. Use abbreviations and shorthand for note taking, and re-work or re-write your notes soon after class to make sure you understand what was said. If you use a recorder, get one with a tape counter and write the numbers of places in the lecture that you were confused, so you can find them easily on the tape.
- Get to know people in your class. You may find a study partner or group to work with, or just make the classroom a more comfortable, friendly learning environment.
- Do your homework as soon after class as possible. The longer you wait, the more you may forget. If you get behind, you will have a harder time understanding further material, and you may become frustrated.
- To solidify your understanding, after you have done your homework, try the following:
  - Check your answers (a tutor in the learning lab may be able to help you check even numbered problems).
  - Do some extra problems from the book in areas where you had trouble.
  - Make up some practice problems and work them.
  - Write out a general, step-by-step procedure for solving each type of problem.
- Make a vocabulary list and a formula list. Use flashcards to memorize definitions and formulas. Remember, math is like a foreign language which you can't speak if you don't know the words.
- Find a place you are comfortable studying, where there are few distractions. If you have a certain place set aside for studying, you will find it easier to get into the right frame of mind to study there.
- Take breaks while studying. The mind works best in short periods of time, between 20 minutes and 45 minutes. When you can't concentrate, take 5-10 minutes to walk around, stretch or have a snack, then return to your work refreshed.
- Get help when you are stuck. Don't agonize for hours. Ask a tutor, your instructor, a classmate, or a friend for help.
- Learn relaxation techniques and practice them before the test so that if you get frustrated you will be able to relax during the test.
- Read more about math anxiety in books such as Overcoming Math Anxiety by Sheila Tobias and about math study skills in books such as Successful Math Study Skills by Paul Nolting and William Savage (these books and more are in the ACC library.)