

My math difficulties began with pre-algebra and fractions

[Science](#), [Mathematics](#)



It was the summer before college when I had the best vacation in my life. I never had enjoyed any vacation since the past years. Too bad I became so pre-occupied with take pleasure in this escapement that I lost my penchant for learning. Summer was fast ending and I had to pack-up hastily and drive back home. And schooldays are coming.

I felt like a lonely cavalier on my college's first math class. As everyone on the class each has varied high school backgrounds, I found it hard to cope up with the subjects pace. I got a very failing mark on my first quiz. And worse, it went on until the end of the semester.

My young freshman mind found it tough to adapt to such a demanding subject. I always had to sleep late at night solving problems and forgetting them when I wake up in the morning. My mouth gaped at the sight of endless assignments and workbooks. Our teacher could see our agony, our pleading eyes hoping she would blow her whistle and let us take a break from the work. Twenty pages of reading and a worn out pencil eraser keeps me awake every night. I sweated over those small numbers above and below the fraction line. How could I learn all this and still have time to watch Smallville? This wasn't a freshman's usual anxiety. I honestly thought I hated math. What is this subject anyway? Why would I have to really put much time and agony into it?

Nightmares would come in numbers dancing across my room. It would torment me just thinking about how bad my day became because of that exasperating pre-algebra exam. It would send me down lurching on the sofa everyday when I get home. Nothing had been that much demoralizing, when

the test papers were returned and what you got isn't even enough to lift your aching pride, what more than to show it to your mom.

A research paper, published Anna Sierpinska, Georgeana Bobos and Christine Knipping of Concordia University in Canada (August 2007), tackles about the frustration in students of mathematical courses. Their paper summarizes the reactions of the students and instructors they interviewed. They identified numerous causes of frustration, such as the fast pace of the courses, inefficient learning strategies, the need to change previously acquired ways of thinking, difficult rapport with truth and reasoning in mathematics, being forced to take PMC, insufficient academic and moral support on the part of teachers, and poor achievement (Sierpinska, Bobos and Knipping, 2007). These sources of frustration are discussed from the point of view of their impact on the quality of the mathematical knowledge that students develop in mathematical subjects.

All of us go through all of the learning stages but not always on the same timetable (Hood, 1997). Sometimes, other inclinations in us, like music and arts, develop much earlier than the others and we do not fully grasp many mathematical concepts until we reach adulthood. In our course of growing up, we learn through our environment and according to our level of maturity (Hood, 1997).

The book "Taking the Frustration out of Math" by Mary Hood tells us about the three distinct learning styles (auditory, visual and kinesthetic). She relates them to math learning. Along her book, she reminds us that each kid

is diverse and that the parent is truly the expert on his/her own child. If a child is not grasping a concept, she recommends putting it aside and working on it again at a later date. Frustrating the child will only make a child hate math. Just because a child should be in a particular stage, does not mean that the individual child is ready for certain concepts. Eventually, he or she will be.

Some websites, such as “Coping with Math Anxiety” offers various ways on coping with math frustrations. It recommends that the primary pace is to identify that math anxiety is an emotional response. And since it is an emotional reaction, it can be in a constructive or unconstructive way. Unconstructive ways comprises rationalization, suppression, and denial.

By rationalization, we mean finding reasons why it is okay and perhaps even inevitable, and therefore justified, for you to have this reaction. By suppression is meant having awareness of the anxiety, but trying very, very hard not to feel it. Finally, there is denial. People using this approach probably aren't likely to see this essay, much less read it, for they carefully construct their lives so as to avoid all mathematics as much as possible (Coping with Math Anxiety, www.mathacademy.com/pr/minitext/anxiety).

The constructive way to manage math anxiety involves making as conscious as possible the sources of math anxiety in one's own life, accepting those feelings without self-criticism, and then learning strategies for disarming math anxiety's influence on one's future study of mathematics (Coping with Math Anxiety, www.mathacademy.com/pr/minitext/anxiety).

I never had much luck on my first college math subject. It took me countless sleepless nights before it dawned on me that I had much more things to prove and accomplish. One time or another, each of us will be haunted by math frustrations. We may take it as a frustration forever, or we could take it as a positive challenge to move on to much greater heights, where our past failure becomes too insignificant.

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