

My name is Jan Lighthill-Ridley, and I am an 'older than average' student returning to school this year after a hiatus of several years. When I learned that one of the classes I needed to graduate in May was an algebra class I was deeply concerned. It had been more than 30 years since I had last taken an algebra class and I hadn't been the best of math students back then. Once I took the placement test on the first day of class, I was absolutely panicked! I not only couldn't answer the questions on that test, I couldn't even understand enough of the math language on the test to understand what I was being asked!

When the placement test results came back, it was strongly suggested (and strongly was in bold print) that I go back and take remedial math, then Math 102 and *then* try Math 103! I knew I couldn't do that. Both time and financial constraints dictate that I graduate in May. The Math 103 class was one I had to have in order to graduate. Not taking the class and not passing it, were not acceptable options, therefore I had to take the class, and I had to pass it. The first step was understanding and accepting that. The second step was understanding that determination wasn't going to get me through it. I needed to come up with a plan and I needed to commit myself to it. So I academic affairs and asked for a tutor. I went online and looked up some really good math tutorials to help get me up to speed (West Texas A&M has an excellent set of tutorials online.

<http://www.wtamu.edu/academic/anns/mps/math/mathlab/>), and I talked to Dr. Yamauchi. I explained to him that I had to have that class, that I knew I wasn't up to level, and I knew that it wasn't going to be easy but that I was willing to commit myself to working hard and spending whatever time on math that I needed to in order to get through the class with a passing grade. He warned me that it would mean spending more time on my lessons than the others in the class, but I had meant it when I'd told him I was willing to make that commitment. And so I did.

The first two weeks of the class, I spent more than 20 hours a week on math between tutorials and trying to get the assignments done correctly, even with the help of my tutor. At the end of the first math test, I drove home from class in tears knowing I had not done well. I was discouraged and demoralized. But nothing had changed. I still needed Math 103 to graduate. I still needed to graduate in May. So I had a good cry, then remade my commitment, and talked to Dr Yamauchi again, expressing my frustration and my fear.

We sat down and talked about the way I was studying. He made several suggestions to help. I began rewriting my notes after every class while the material was still fresh in my mind, highlighting definitions and steps to solving problems with a highlighter. When I did assignments, problems I had difficulty with were marked with a highlighter or colored pencil and I arrived at every class armed with a list of questions I had which we went over in class. The second test was even worse than the first, but by the time we got to the third test, I began to feel as if I were beginning to understand. And I was!

After the second test, I had realized that part of the problem was that I needed to go back and take a look at the first assignments again. Each new assignment, builds on the lessons in the one preceding it. If you don't understand the first lesson, the second becomes even more difficult. So I went back and reviewed the lessons and the notes from the first two tests. And where I was confused by the lessons, I asked questions. Once again I re-read the class notes from those lectures I re-wrote the steps to solving

the types of problems that they covered. I highlighted those steps and then I did those problems more than once until I was comfortable with the process that led to the answers! Dr. Yamauchi had said that the repetition would help. It did. I got an A! I began to feel that perhaps there was hope.

From that point on, tests were taken with renewed confidence. I was getting it! And I did! I am proud to say that in spite of those first two tests, I came out of the semester with an A in my math class! So I can say with authority to those of you who think math is a really scary place to be....It is doable! I did it! And so can you! I can also say that having done it, I'm feeling pretty able to handle anything this semester has to throw at me! Thank you Dr. Y!