

I am an OTA (Older than Average) student. I never had any kind of Algebra in high school, so Algebra was all new to me. It took me 3 years to complete Math 099 Algebra 102 and Algebra 103, while taking 102 twice. I was so frustrated at first because I just could not understand why I would even have to take Algebra and exactly what the purpose of it was. Since I am older, I thought I could just start with Algebra 103 and be done with it. Well that logic didn't work for me. I now know that going back to the beginning starting with Math 099, was where I needed to start no matter how old I am. When I was having so much trouble understanding the problems, I really felt that I would never understand and I was starting to feel I was pretty stupid. I was afraid to ask questions because I thought the instructor might get irritated by my constant questions. I now know that asking questions is very important and the instructor is there to teach and to help understand. So ask questions and keep asking until something makes sense or even a little bit of sense. There is never any stupid question and most of the time there will be other students who will be so glad you asked that "stupid" question.

Fall semester 2007, the first day of Algebra 103, I took the entrance exam. The next class period it was suggested that I take 102 over again. By this time, there was nothing going to stop me from taking 103, not even the instructor, because by now I have had it with Algebra! They can take " $a + b = c$ " and stick it in infinity, as far as I was concerned.

So for 103 I was determined to do better. I wasted a lot of time of trying to figure out what the exact purpose of Algebra was. I decided that I just needed to have an open mind and needed to quit trying so hard to figure out the purpose of Algebra.

I feel what got me through was I had two very good instructors, Mr. David Olson and Dr. Taka Yamauchi. David Olson planted the Algebra seed in my mind and worked with me, not just putting numbers and letters on the board but making it as easy as possible to try and understand Algebra. I had Mr. Olson for Math 099 and then went to Algebra 102 the second time around with Mr. Olson. I didn't do as well as I would have liked but things were starting to click. I was very disappointed when Mr. Olson left. I almost thought I would just have to quit college because I would never have anybody that could teach like he did. With a new instructor being hired I decided to give it one more shot.

Dr. Taka gave us a handout the second day on how to learn and how to study for Algebra. One of the things he stressed was that everyone in class must write down everything from the chalkboard and then the first thing to do when studying after class is to rewrite the notes in our own understanding. Also he stressed to practice, practice, and practice. Even rewrite the homework problems 3 times in a row, until we understood. So I went through a lot of paper rewriting notes and rewriting problems over and over again. It got to where the problems were starting to make sense to me and I was starting to think, "oh that's why" or "that's how" or "I

remember Mr. Olson showing me how to do that problem". I also used the Purple Math website. That website explained problems pretty easy for me.

When test time came, it was very important to me to be in class for review. All the problems on the test were reviewed in class. I missed the first test review and it sure showed on my first test (failed). After that each test got better and better. I was amazed at how my understanding of Algebra had improved so much from the start of the semester to the final exam. What helped me to progress was to make sure and be in class all the time, to ask questions, rewrite all my notes after each class and to practice, practice, and practice. To study for the tests I also would rewrite the review problems many, many times until it made sense to me. At the beginning of the semester I went from a failing grade with my first test to passing with an A. What a huge accomplishment and I did it!!

Now I passed Algebra 103 with an "A" and I have never been so proud of myself!! I made sure and told everybody I knew that I got an A. I wanted to go through the Jamestown phonebook and call every name in there but I figured some people wouldn't understand.

I have to tackle Chemistry next year and have been pretty nervous about that, but since Algebra 103, I have a lot more confidence in myself and will also have an open mind when I do start the class. It takes a very good instructor and a lot of hard work, but it certainly is rewarding with the end results.

Now if I hear somebody say how stupid Algebra is and they don't know why they have to take it because they certainly will not be using it in their future job, I tell them, "hey Algebra is meant to teach us problem solving."

So Good luck to you all!! Show up for class, ask questions, re-write your chalkboard notes and practice, practice, practice.

Sincerely,

Laureen Linstaedt