

How to Overcome Math Anxiety

What is Math Anxiety?

Many people can remember a time when they struggled with math and began to doubt their abilities. What people perceive as math inability is often actually anxiety. For many math anxious people, negative emotions get in the way of learning. Math anxiety is a learned negative response to participating in math class, listening to lecture, and working through problems. Common symptoms of math anxiety include feelings of helplessness, lack of confidence and the belief that one does not have a “math mind.”

Tips for Overcoming Math Anxiety

1. **Success in math is not about talent**, it is about time and preparation. Everyone has taken a different path to NAU. Some students did not have the opportunity to be successful in math and build confidence before coming to college. However, with practice and effort everyone can succeed in math.
2. **Resist the temptation to feel inadequate** when confronting a new idea or problem. It took humanity thousands of years to develop the mathematical concepts you are learning. Ideas like the concept of zero and negative numbers once confused and frustrated the best mathematicians.
3. **Math is about practice and repetition**. Unlike other subjects, you cannot listen to a lecture or read a textbook and fully understand the concepts and ideas discussed. Math is about *doing* more than just listening or copying. Asking questions, referring to the textbook, drawing diagrams or plugging hypothetical numbers into an equation are all part of the *active* process of doing math.
4. **Failure is a natural part of learning** mathematics. Mistakes are part of the learning process; do not interpret them as reflections of your intelligence.
5. **Work on math a little at a time** rather than attempting to cram the information into a long study session. Try spending an hour each day working on problems.
6. **Go back and review** math from previous courses. Math is cumulative, so you need to understand the foundations of a problem before you can solve it.
7. **Conceptual understanding is the goal**, not memorization. Rather than memorize or copy the solution to a problem, try to understand why it works. In a stressful situation, such as during an exam, conceptual understanding will help you complete the problems.
8. **Take pride in your successes**, no matter how small they may seem.
9. **Get help** from a peer tutor in the Academic Success Centers.