**Math Anxiety**

By [Deb Russell](http://math.about.com/bio/Deb-Russell-8887.htm), About.com Guide

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**What is Math Anxiety?**

Math anxiety or fear of math is actually quite common. Math anxiety is quite similar to stagefright. Why does someone suffer stagefright? Fear of something going wrong in front of a crowd? Fear of forgetting the lines? Fear of being judged poorly? Fear of going completely blank? Math anxiety conjures up fear of some type. The fear that one won't be able to do the math or the fear that it's too hard or the fear of failure which often stems from having a lack of confidence. For the most part, math anxiety is the fear about doing the math right, our minds draw a blank and we think we'll fail and of course the more frustrated and anxious our minds become, the greater the chance for drawing blanks. Added pressure of having time limits on math tests and exams also cause the levels of anxiety grow for many [students](http://math.about.com/od/reference/a/anxiety.htm).

**Where Does Math Anxiety Come From?**

Usually math anxiety stems from unpleasant experiences in mathematics. Typically math phobics have had math presented in such a fashion that it led to limited understanding. Unfortunately, math anxiety is often due to poor teaching and poor experiences in math which typically leads to math anxiety. Many of the students I've encountered with math anxiety have demonstrated an over reliance on procedures in math as opposed to actually understanding the math. When one tries to memorize procedures, rules and routines without much understanding, the math is quickly forgotten and panic soons sets in. Think about your experiences with one concept - the division of fractions. You probably learned about reciprocals and inverses. In other words, 'It's not yours to reason why, just invert and multiply'. Well, you memorized the rule and it works. Why does it work? Do you really understand why it works? Did anyone every use pizzas or math manipulatives to show you why it works? If not, you simply memorized the procedure and that was that. Think of math as memorizing all the procedures - what if you forget a few? Therefore, with this type of strategy, a good memory will help, but, what if you dont' have a good memory. Understanding the math is critical. Once students realize they can do the math, the whole notion of math anxiety can be overcome. Teachers and parents have an important role to ensure students understand the math being presented to them.

**Myths and Misconceptions**
None of the following are true!

You're born with a math gene, either you get it or you don't.

Math is for males, females never get math!

It's hopeless, and much too hard for average people.

If the logical side of your brain isn't your strenght, you'll never do well in math.

Math is a cultural thing, my culture never got it!

There's only one right way to do math.

**Overcoming Math Anxiety**

1. A positive attitude will help. However, positive attitudes come with quality teaching for understanding which often isn't the case with many traditional approaches to teaching mathematics.

2. Ask questions, be determined to 'understand the math'. Don't settle for anything less during instruction. Ask for clear illustrations and or demonstrations or simulations.

3. Practice regularly, especially when you're having difficulty.

4. When total understanding escapes you, hire a tutor or work with peers that understand the math. You can do the math, sometimes it just take a different approach for you to understand some of the concepts.

5. Don't just read over your notes - do the math. Practice the math and make sure you can honestly state that you understand what you are doing.

6. Be persistent and don't over emphasize the fact that we all make mistakes. Remember, some of the most powerful learning stems from making a mistake.

Find out more about the [myths of doing math](http://math.about.com/cs/mathreform/a/myths.htm) and you too will overcome math anxiety. And, if you think making mistakes is a bad thing, look again. Sometimes the most powerful learning stems from making mistakes. Find out [how.](http://math.about.com/od/reference/a/Errors.htm)