

Attitude Errors: Common Mistakes of Thought or Attitude

The most common mistakes made by community college students are related to laziness and avoidance. At the core is often a fear of really trying and not succeeding. But without trying, one cannot succeed.

“I didn’t read the syllabus”, or “Once I read the syllabus, I didn’t think you were serious.”

A college syllabus is a legally-binding agreement. Professors write them carefully and accurately.

“I’ll do extra credit to raise my grade.”

This is college, not high school. You can’t substitute some other activity for what you’re supposed to learn.

“I’ll just study hard enough to pass.” Or “I don’t have to study that, it won’t be on the exam.” Or “I’ll blow off the homework.” Or “Cutting class does no harm.” Or “I’ll wait until the exam.”

How do you know what not to study? Beware of what you don’t know. You probably don’t know how big it is. Even students who start off well, or take exams well, or seem to be naturally good at math routinely fail college classes because they just don’t do the basics: attend class, do all the homework, and study daily.

“I don’t want any stress.”

A moderate amount of stress is good. Absolutely no stress is bad – it leads to laziness and failed educations.

“This is a high school class.” Or “I’m repeating this class; I learned it and don’t need to work.”

If you learned it before, why did you place into this class (or lower) when you took the placement exam? If you learned it before, why did you get a failing grade? If you really do know it, why not get credit for the class by challenge exam?

“When I didn’t understand, I stopped taking notes.”

If you don’t understand, you have to ask. If you don’t take notes, you won’t know what to ask about.

“I understood it when we did it in class.” Or “When I read through my notes, I’ll remember.”

I work hard to give you clear explanations and thorough notes with examples. In class, it may seem like you know it better than you do.

“I’ll just work really hard at the end of the semester, get an A on the final, and pass.”

In past semesters, the people who got an A on the final already had an A or a B. If students could learn the whole course in a few weeks, it wouldn’t be a semester class.

“If I don’t pass, I’ll just take it again.”

And you’ll waste money, time, your psychological well-being, and some other student’s seat in this class.

“Others seem to learn math more quickly and easily than I do.” Or “Even if I use the MathXL help buttons on every problem, I’ll have learned enough.”

The successful student does all the homework, memorizing every method, however long that takes. If you always use the help buttons, you’ve learned to click buttons. Math has to be in your head, not outside.

“I’m disorganized or have sloppy handwriting, but that doesn’t matter.”

Some disorganization can be harmless. But disorganization leads to missed classes, forgotten commitments, sloppy or incomplete work, and wrong details in math. It’s amazing how often sloppy handwriting sabotages math students. A 2 becomes a Z, and the whole problem is suddenly confusing and difficult – or so simplistic that you miss the point. In math, details are important.

“What I do (or don’t do) has no effect on anyone else.”

If you’re hard-working, ask questions, and are optimistic, the people around you are more likely to work harder, ask more questions, and think optimistically. And if you cut class, don’t do homework, say how awful you are at math, cram at the last minute, or lose hope, those around you are likely to do and think the same. The best classes have outspoken students who work hard to correct mistakes, notice that working hard pays off, and work harder and inspire others to work harder.