Wanna Pass Your Math Class?
J Carl Krause, Cabrillo College

It’s important to realize that while there are many factors that contribute to one’s success (or failure) in a math class, some of these factors are within your control. What follows is some general advice for being successful in any math class … regardless of “how good you are” at math.

1. **Attend Class** – If you miss a lecture, you’ll have to read the textbook and figure it out on your own … this is lame. Have you ever tried to read a math textbook? Trust me, it’s much easier to have someone (preferably a professional) explain things to you. That’s typically what happens in class, so it’s important to attend.

2. **Take Good Notes** – Your notes should be complete enough so that you could reconstruct the lecture for a classmate who wasn’t there. Keep in mind that, during lecture, most instructors emphasize material that shows up on quizzes and exams. Learn to recognize when instructors give “clues” as to what they think is important and consider putting a star next to that topic in your notes.

3. **Go Over Your Notes** – At some point after class (like right before you start doing homework), take some time to go over your class notes. This will refresh your memory of what was discussed in class.

4. **Do The Homework** – Guess what? This is the most important part of being successful in a math class. This also happens to be the most common reason students don’t pass: they didn’t do (or do enough of) the homework. The common pitfalls with homework are students who…

   a) Think they already know how to do it … without actually finding out for sure
   b) Are successful with the first few problems and think they can do the entire assignment
   c) Simply copy answers from the back of the book and think they’ve “done the homework”

   The first thing doing homework does is let you know what you know how to do and what you don’t know how to do. Here’s a simple question: is it better to find this out by doing the homework or by taking the exam? The second thing doing homework does is to let you practice the stuff you know and help you learn the stuff you don’t. If you get stuck on a homework problem, try finding a similar problem in your notes or in the textbook that can give you some ideas about how to proceed. Don’t give up.

5. **Get Help When You Are Confused** – If you just flat out can’t figure a problem out, get help. Don’t spend 3 hours trying to figure out one problem! If your instructor answers homework questions during class time, be sure to ask. If you can’t get your question answered during class time, go to your instructor’s office hours (don’t be shy) or go to one of the tutoring services on campus. The bottom line is that you must get any confusion cleared up as soon as possible.

6. **Form A Study Group** – As you get to know others in class, see if you can schedule some time each week to work together as a group. It usually works best if you spend some time by yourself working on problems and then come together as a group to grind out the more complicated problems.

So there you go … some advice. I’ve certainly taken a lot of math classes myself and I’ve been teaching this stuff for almost 20 years (yikes!). It may or may not be important for you to pass your math class … this you have to decide for yourself. If it’s important that you pass - if it’s a priority - try doing all of the above. I bet you’ll do better than you ever have in a math class. Holy smokes, math might even become “easy” for you … imagine that.

“I was pretty freaked about taking Math 4 … everybody told me how tough of a course it was. Right from the start it was clear who was doing the homework and who wasn’t. The people who weren’t doing the homework all failed hard. All I did was go to class and do all the homework … it made sense and I passed easy.” – Nick S.