

Algebra II Advice: At the end of last year, I had students write a letter to themselves, describing what they wish they had known before they started the year. Here are some excerpts from their responses. Different students learn differently, and it was clear from reading these that each student had a different experience in the same class, so see if there's any advice that might work for you.

“Really try hard to absorb all the information you can from class, because even though the textbook is very useful, it's hard to rely solely on it for your homework and test preparation... Ask questions, do not be afraid you will be judged because most likely the kid next to you is wondering the same thing but he/she is too afraid to say anything.”

“I would recommend using a pencil and not a pen when doing your math homework... I wouldn't recommend studying for a test at the last minute... I would recommend meeting with Mr. Shah if you're absent a couple of days... I would recommend having fun!”

“Mr. Shah doesn't give a lot of partial credit and there's no extra credit assignments following a test – so do the best you can and don't get too upset. Stay confident. You have the capability to succeed in math – you just need to put your head to it and stay in the game.”

“You will find that all it takes to do well on the tests is to diligently do homework, hand it in, and study for 30-45 minutes the night before. It's really quite simple... To give you a heads up, there are going to be a few units that will be very difficult. One is factoring, the other is the later trigonometry. There will be nonsense about positive quadrants, inverse trigonometric functions, unit circles and so on. All of it useless [because] 2008 will mark the year that artificial intelligence reaches a new level.”

“After you have a quiz or two with those ‘identify the graph’ questions and you only get half correct because of luck and are completely stumped by the other half, go see Mr. Shah! It's a different kind of problem than you're used to and it's a personal difficulty, but he will be more than happy to help you with it... It's a good idea to sit back and listen sometimes instead of taking notes (especially when doing a specific problem instead of learning a general rule on the board).”

“Always have your calculator and pencils, and always do your H.W. because that will save you. Study for your quizzes more because they matter, and don't stress out much. Work hard and you'll do really well this year.”

“The one thing I feel is most important to succeed in this class is to pay attention, take copious notes, and always do your homework. I didn't feel like I struggled with the course work at all and I felt that the homework, quiz, and test schedule was always fair. But a good thing to do would be to do the homework due for Tuesday, not Monday night, but sometime over the weekend so other classes wouldn't stress you out as much... Another really good tip for this class in an effort to study for quizzes and tests would be to do the practice problems in the textbook towards the end of the chapter. I only recently started to do this in preparation for tests and I've found it has helped me a lot. I wish that I had incorporated this technique of studying into process earlier on in the year.”

“Calculators are very important to have for every class. Many things we do by hand, for more complex problems you need to use a calculator.”

“I wish you had taken at least 20 minutes each night to make sure that you actually understood the material. During times in class where you were lost, you just assumed that you would understand it at a later date. In some cases, this latter date never arrived.”

“The most important classes for you will be those in which Mr. Shah presents a topic for the first time. Take careful notes in those periods because a strong foundation promotes a strong later comprehensive and a future ease in application of the concept... There are many side-tricks and proper mental states to be in when one does math and although your mind and the practice of math haven't always gotten along in the past, try to see it as you and Mr. Shah against math.

“Be careful, points are worth everything and you must show all of your work. Things must be clear so he knows exactly what you are doing. I warn you because if you don't points may be deducted. Showing your work lets Mr. Shah know you actually know the material and understand each step... Another precaution is that when he tells you that you need to know something (unit circle, range of graphs of inverse sin, cos and tan, etc.), learn it... Also, you will love Mr. Shah's new fonts. They are pretty awesome.”

“Let me give you some advice before you start the year. Think about how your grade is calculated before you go stressing out over everything. One really easy way to get your grade up is to simply complete your homework every night... Another good thing to do is to spend a long time on your homework every night and retry problems you know you got wrong until you are completely stuck. This way, you can have specific questions answered in class and when the time for the test comes around, you'll be in a lot better shape than you think... Also... you should always double check your answers. I did it a few times and that changed my grade from what would have been a B to an A.”

“This is not the kind of class that you can take for granted as an 'easy A' by any means, but it also won't mean you will meet your demise either... Do not, DO NOT treat quizzes as just a quiz as if they don't matter because they aren't tests. They count for a lot of your grade and there are a lot of them.”

“I'm not sure what to say first. Probably, above all, relax a bit. It's alright to make mistakes in the beginning, as long as you eventually get the hang of it... Don't rely on your calculator too much to do the simplest problems, my brain feels like jello because of that.”

“When taking the test if there are many formulas write them out at the top of the page so you are not trying to remember them all throughout the test.”

“Algebra/Trigonometry II is not a class you need to freak out over. Although math isn't really known to be a strong suit of yours I don't think this class will have you overwhelmed... You've never had a teacher who has done this but Mr. Shah makes sure to post every lesson the day that it's been taught. You might have some nights where you find yourself cramming for a quiz or a test but the lessons posted on the course conference will definitely be a huge help.”

“I'd say the most important thing for you to know is that you need to make sure you understand each day's material. If one day is particularly hard or confusing don't tell yourself you'll learn it later; you need to make sure you learn it right there and then.... [Also] when studying don't just read over notes, but do practice problems. Sometimes when you read over notes you will think you understand the material when in fact you can't apply it to problems.”

