

advice from algebra II students past

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.

You will have a fun time in Mr. Shah's class and even though it's fun to bother [neighbor] for all fifty minutes, it is also very fun to listen to Mr. Shah because Algebra II is interesting. I know you haven't really liked math in the past, but Algebra is like a puzzle and both you and I know, we love puzzles. Many of the formulae and topics in math this year are relatively easy, but you must memorize the formulas **CORRECTLY**. Some of the formulae (for example the half life of carbon) have two different ways to write it but mean exactly the same thing. Remember to not mix the two formulae because that will seriously mess you up. Also, homework is very important, so do **ALL OF IT**; and late homework doesn't count. We have a problem with late stuff, so just try hard to get it in on time. For tests, if you have a test on Monday and studied and understood everything on Friday, make sure to look it over during the weekend cause our brain tends to run out of space to handle everything and definitely needs a refresher every couple days to keep things where they need to be.

For one thing, I strongly advise doing your homework every night. The homework is short enough and if you get the material (I certainly did, for the most part) easy enough to be a welcome aid to your grades. I've found that even if I've underachieved or gone so far as bombing a quiz or test, my unshakeable consistency with assignments redeems me. In order to do this, you need to be organized... Also, Mr. Shah is extremely insistent on your having graph paper and a three-ringed binder...

Also, review exponent rules that you learned from 9th grade... You'll have a great foothold on new material if you're caught up on the older fundamentals. Most of all, don't go into the class with a poor attitude—in the past, I know you've thought that you're terrible at math, but my ability to grasp concepts this year and last year too has started to turn my stance on that in the other direction. So be open. Mr. Shah also catches on to that kind of malcontent pretty easily so be careful... he wants joy and excitement in his class, not pessimism.

Wow, Algebra II has been so much harder than I thought! I didn't think it would be so difficult. As much as I struggled understanding the material, I did find ways to get more comfortable with it. Some tests I did badly on (very badly), while some I got As on. I always felt very accomplished after getting an A on one of Mr. Shah's assessments. Just hand in there – you will get it! Don't forget to meet with Mr. Shah as much as you can – he is **EXTREMELY** helpful. Before you meet with him, figure out what is giving you difficulty so that you are prepared. Make sure that when you leave his office, you understand conceptually what is going on. That is definitely the hardest thing for you to grasp... Even though Algebra has been very difficult, it has helped me a lot with the SATs. There are a ton of questions that involve Algebra II, and I'm really thankful that I've been taught it well so that I can use my Algebra II knowledge for the SATs. Keep working hard, it will pay off!

This year has been full of challenges that I've had to work through but in the end things always seem to work out. I think that if you had been aware that you were going to be too hard on yourself throughout your time in this course you would've had a different tactic for attacking the work at hand. It's good that you work hard but you don't need to stress so much about it. I think that one of the biggest things to take away from this year is that you perform best when you meet with Mr. Shah before assessments or if you weren't 100% clear on the lesson. Even if you knew what was going on it seemed that meeting with him to prove to yourself that you knew what you were going made you less anxious about an assignment and boosted your confidence level on the material.

Taking clear notes is also extremely effective—you need to make sure that you don't space out in class because if you do you'll most certainly fall off the train. One thing I've learned with Algebra II is that everything builds up on previous lessons, if you miss something or never take the time to clear it up then you're going to be hazy for the rest of that quarter... and possibly longer.

I think in all, the way that this course was arranged and taught worked well for you because it didn't move too quickly and each topic was broken down in such a way that the information never came all in a bunch. The PowerPoints I think were a great way to teach this course because it was possible to post the lessons from that day which really helped when studying for an assessment or if you missed a class. All in all I think this year was quite successful...

Mr. Shah is fun, and you'll find the year really easy. Just remember to do all your homework, because not doing your homework made you get a bad grade first semester. **DO YOUR HOMEWORK!!** If you do your homework, you will get an A. This is one of your favorite classes because you don't have to study that much, and you find it pretty simple.

Thank goodness that you are going to have that math class: fun and learning, wowsa! And that Mr. Shah; always with the utmost energy and excitement while teaching those occasionally tired students of his. But before I scare you off with junior year stress, let me give you some pointers that will help you out in math class: first off, always listen in class. Mr. Shah goes at a steady pace, so feel free to ask questions whenever you are not sure about something. And if you're sick? Don't worry about it—the notes are on the course conference (go figure!). And when it comes to homework, always be consistent. It will be for your own good. If you do the homework every night, when the assessment arrives, you will realize that you already know all the information. But that doesn't mean that you should not review anything. And if you have any questions before the big day, make sure to ask Mr. Shah. Most likely, there will be something about it on the test. He is really good with email, so that's always a good means of communication.... So in conclusion, arrive early to class, be attentive when you're there, work carefully on the homework, and always have fun.

[T]o do well in Mr. Shah's class you need to prepare yourself well for tests and quizzes... Don't wait until the night before the test to just glance over the topics, and don't review when there are friends around; they are a huge distraction. It helps to make up a few problems and solve them, or, if he has not given you one, create a review sheet. You don't have to worry about that though, because to my knowledge Mr. Shah always gives a review sheet at least two days before the tests, and lets you know about any upcoming tests or quizzes at least a week before. Don't stress!

I am not going to say there won't be some proud moments that will involve scratch-and-sniff stickers, I just want to give you some more advice on how to potentially achieve that sweet-smelling sticker a bit more frequently. First off, embrace the who is Mr. Shah for all he is, with all of his quirks, some of which you may and may not appreciate. You must welcome the opportunity to emancipate yourself from the dependency on the pen and to exert self control when the impulse to sit near a friend arises during a test. It will behoove you to understand going into class what exactly Mr. Shah wants from you, which is an attentive, honest, and interested student. It has taken me about six months to realize what Mr. Shah really wants from you; he wants you to ultimately be a good person in the world... Above all else, as this seems to be an area at which you struggle with in all aspects of your daily life—do not Day Dream! I know this will be hard for you, and I know that you have had an especially bad track record since the 5th grade controlling your need to dream in math. This is not the year to continue this cycle; this is the year to stand up to your wonderful brain and say “No.” Be firm, and I know you can succeed. Good luck, take my advice, and have fun.

Well be prepared for math to be FUN again!

Mr. Shah will bring a dynamic, entertaining, and above all organized approach to math that might have been lacking in the previous years. For the first time in a long time you will enjoy math! And doing your homework and studying for tests really is not going to be that bad. Make sure that you do your homework though because its really helpful! If you find that some homeworks are difficult, look at the back of the book and try to take your time. But don't worry if at first you don't understand something because Mr. Shah will make sure that you do before any big assessments. He's really helpful when you meet with him outside of the class...

You will really enjoy the clothing that Mr. Shah wears every day and by the second month it will no longer be a surprise when he shows up in class with a scarf on and its 90 degrees out. The glasses that he will wear on his head in the winter/spring will be very amusing.

Don't worry about this class! You are going to learn a lot, it's not going to be that hard though you are going to feel as if you accomplished a great deal. All is well!

Today I celebrate another good, long year of math. To commemorate this historic event, I have decided to write to you, detailing the year that has passed. Irreversible changes and/or paradoxes aside, I believe this knowledge will be to your benefit. Now, might as well start with the teacher himself. Sameer Shah is a genial, eccentric professor, and quite good at what he does. His delivery is clear, engaging, and humorous; it will work quite well for you. The tests are also well-timed with the material so you will rarely be ill-prepared. The homework is also quite easy. Rarely will an assignment be incredibly long or difficult. If it is, Mr. Shah is usually quite understanding of your confusions, which is nice. However, one thing to be said about homework is that you must be sure to be very punctual about... it.

In algebra make sure you take the tests slowly and carefully because careless errors really count up in the grades; there is enough time to do this so don't rush. Make sure you do all of the homework wholeheartedly because doing each homework contributes to understanding the topic as a whole. Not understanding one homework and not making the effort to dramatically affects your grade on the tests. Make sure you always have your calculator and always use pencil. Being organized and having a neat binder helps. The night before a test make sure you know how to do every problem on the study guide or on the list of topics because they are normally the same problems rewritten. The conceptual word problems unit will be very difficult for you, make sure you pay attention and practice them.

[Y]ou're going to find that you are going to have to work harder than last year with regards to math. You have to likewise work outside of class other than just doing your homework and are going to have to actually study for every test instead of cramming the night before. Anyway, just thought I would throw some tips your way as you enter your junior year in high school. The first thing is, do your homework, every night, don't just copy it down from the back of the book, if you don't do it, you won't be able to understand the material at all. Also, listen to Mr. Shah and pay attention in class, its no longer geometry and you cannot simply memorize proofs and information, its now a more traditional "math" class and you're going to have to learn to apply what you know to every class, its like a pyramid, you're constantly going to build on what you know in every class. Also, try not to give Mr. Shah a hard time during class, you're going to end up really liking him as a teacher and his is a very good teacher, one of the best math teachers you would have had so far. Anyway if there is anything you take away from this message to sum it up it's basically just to do your work.
