

It is no secret that math can be overwhelming. The pressures of grades and colleges loom, while many teachers fail at properly imparting the lessons smoothly. So when a student endearingly gripes, "Mr. Ahdoot, but I HATE factoring..." I use the moment as an opportunity to reshift her thinking. I reply, "Don't hate the factoring, hate that you don't know it." The goal in my world is to reinvent how students succeed in math, by instilling a sense that the material is approachable, manageable, and conquerable. To reshape their experience through personal inspiration.

Let's examine a typical situation that every student faces: the upcoming unit test. During the days beforehand, the student, parents, and teacher should proactively create a list of the essential skills needed to succeed on this test. Then, come up with a plan to focus on one skill at a time. This strategy works for many reasons. First, it helps the student realize that she might know more than she previously assumed. It creates that elusive and comforting feeling of setting clear and attainable goals. On a practical level, this "divide and conquer" method allows for a plan of action that is dynamic and flexible. Perhaps the teacher can help with one of the skills during office hours. Then a friend who is confident with another skill can impart it during lunch or after school. The more light we can shed on what exactly is lacking, the easier it is to fill in those gaps. Without this strategy, students and parents can easily throw up their hands and say that the whole task is hopeless. Yet with this classroom tested plan, students can empower themselves to climb out the hole. We can provide them the crucial experience of having overcome a significant life challenge, which may elevate the overall confidence needed to solve any problem in their future.

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