When you turn to face the actual coursework of going back to school, two monsters stare back: English and math. They stand ready to drag unwary victims into a maze of auxiliary verbs and quadratic equations.

Here are some grown-up tips on how to conquer English and math.

**English**

More than merely an academic subject or a major, English is a tool that we employ in every classroom and workplace.

Gary Morgan, professor emeritus of journalism and English, offers a practical perspective derived from more than 30 years as an instructor: “Employers are looking for people who can write clearly and effectively and can convey ideas directly.”

Morgan summarizes “English success” as the ability to:

- Write simple, direct sentences that convey the thought or idea that is intended.
- Organize thoughts on paper into a meaningful and coherent collection of ideas.
- Work within a mechanical framework that includes appropriate grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Colleges and universities typically administer tests to determine enrollees’ proficiency in sentence structure, fundamental organization and mechanics. Based on test results, new students are placed in initial English classes that correspond to their skill levels.

Placement in a remedial class—which may also be called a developmental or pre-college level course—is not a punishment. It is your chance to catch up on concepts missed or forgotten from your last time in a classroom. A solid performance in a remedial class will create academic momentum that can carry you all the way to graduation.

In an early English class, you should be assigned a handbook such as *The Little, Brown Handbook* or *The Allyn & Bacon Handbook*. These comprehensive guides cover grammar, punctuation, composition and academic/research writing styles such as MLA, APA, CBE and Chicago style.

**Math**

Mathematics is a sequential discipline, taught in order of difficulty and process, leading students from one level to the next. Where you begin the sequence as an adult learner is the key.

“I think the best thing that returning adult students can do in preparation for taking a math class is to get good advice about what course level they should be placed at,” says David Weinstein, a college and university professor with nearly 30 years of classroom experience.

As is the case with English studies, do not be disheartened with low proficiency test scores or placement in a remedial course.

“It is better to underestimate one’s own abilities and take a course that is partially review in nature rather than overestimating one’s own abilities and getting blown away by the material,” Weinstein advises.

Schools frequently provide free math tutoring through learning resource centers. The centers usually have a collection of instructional media and offer guidance in their usage. Some centers hold seminars on topics such as math anxiety and test-taking strategies.

**Times have changed...and so have you**

If your last stab at English and math occurred when Donna Summer, Duran Duran or the Backstreet Boys were on the charts, take heart that times have changed...and so have you.

Colleges and universities will accommodate your current skills and boost them to a new, highly productive level. Instructors will help you become proficient and comfortable with subject matter and classroom routine.

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