Dear Essentials of Intermediate Algebra Student,

Welcome to Ted’s class. My letter to you is intended to accomplish at least three things. First, I would like to give you some idea about how the course will be run. Next, I have some suggestions to help you succeed in the class, and finally I would like to ask you to write your math autobiography and have it ready for the first class, so I can get to know you better.

You will see in the course description that class participation, through cooperative learning activities, is a very important component of the class and your grade (20%). There are a number of reasons why I emphasize cooperative learning that I would like to share with you. Math can be very boring, especially at the early stages of learning where we need to focus on many rules and operations. By creating a social aspect to the class we can make the class much more interesting by sharing ideas and methods, helping each other, relating our learning experiences, sharing shortcuts we have discovered, and just learning what we know and don’t know so we can focus our efforts. If you are interested in finding out more about cooperative learning you may check my web site at: <http://tpanitz.jimdo.com/coop-learning-articles-by-ted-and-others/>

At the start of most classes I will ask you to work on a class worksheet with a partner. This activity will help you (and me) determine what you know about the topic. Then we can focus on specific problems people are having with the section. At his point I may provide a formal explanation or expand on the subject through a “lecture”. I collect the worksheets at the end of class or when we finish a topic. The success of my approach presumes that you will accept my suggestion for success which comes next.

The key to being successful in math courses is taking responsibility for our learning by being ready for each class. I have a mechanism to accomplish this at no risk to your grade. I will give you a worksheet for each chapter section that I ask you to attempt prior to the class. There will be two writing parts and a problem solving section that will help you determine whether you already know part or all of the material, or none of the material to be covered. This will be due at the beginning of each class. You may work on these pre-class assignments with other students, in the tutor center, or elsewhere at your discretion. The best part is that these assignments will be for extra credit, not a grade. If you make a good effort I will give you a check on each assignment. If you complete all the assignments you will get a grade increase at the end of the semester, ie. from a B to B+. Some people think I am asking you to teach yourself the new material. Absolutely not!!! The more you know before coming to class the better the class will be for you. During and after class you will be very prepared to concentrate on those areas that give you trouble instead of being overwhelmed by all the rules and procedures. If you complete the pre-class and in-class work you will have completed 2/3 of the odd problems in the book and the homework (20% of your grade) will almost be fun.

Finally I would like to ask you to write your math autobiography. I am including some sample questions to help you focus on your math learning history. What are your best math (algebra) learning experiences and what are ones you think could have been better than they were?

If you have any questions or concerns about doing algebra in the Fall please feel free to email me at school at [tpanitz@cascadia.edu](mailto:tpanitz@cascadia.edu)

Regards,

Ted

**WRITING IN MATH--- IS THIS FOR REAL????**

This course will include writing assignments that are intended to help you understand how you are doing in the course and reacting to it. They will also help me to understand how you are doing in the course. This may be new to you so I would ask your patience and perhaps your indulgence.

To start I would like you to write your math autobiography using the following questions as a guideline. You do not have to answer them in order but please do include all the topics. Also write in narrative form, not single sentence responses. Please type using double spaces. I will collect them the first day and return them by the next class.

WHY ARE YOU TAKING THIS COURSE?

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT MATH? ANY IDEA WHY YOU FEEL THAT WAY?

(please be candid with this question, I am never offended by an honest answer)

HAVE YOU USED COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN MATH CLASSES? HOW DID YOU REACT TO THEM?

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU TOOK MATH? HOW DID YOU DO THEN? WHY?

WHAT IS YOUR MAJOR AND HOW WILL THIS COURSE FIT INTO IT?

WHAT TYPE OF EXPERIENCES HAVE YOU HAD IN MATH BEFORE?

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF THAT I DIDN'T ASK?

The writing part of this course is very important and will be new to you in a math course. I take it very seriously and will collect the assignments and return them to you. They are not graded but help top provide a different way of communicating about the course and math.

The key to understanding math is reading and writing, not algebra or arithmetic. Thus I want us to work on writing as a means of reinforcing our reading applied to math.

When you are finished add a headline to your autobiography as though it were a newspaper article. Use your imagination.

IF YOU CAN EXPRESS YOURSELF IN WRITING THEN YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE DOING. A famous quote by author and scholar--Ted Panitz.