

## For the mathematically accident prone student

by

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Many students make the claim that they are prone to making stupid mistakes and this kills them on my exams where there is little mercy due to little partial credit.

Correct answers are nice in mathematics. They demonstrate more than incorrect answers, whatever the reason for the incorrect answer.

Students who are accident prone in mathematics might as well address the issue and take action now rather than wait until it ruins their life.

And, yes, there are things you can do. If you know you make stupid mistakes, try checking your work. It is better to have half the problems on a test correct than all of the problems half correct. Check your work, preferably in different ways. If the solution is to a differential equation, check that it solves the differential equation by plugging it in rather than just checking your steps.

Steps! There is another idea. Actually write down everything you do in an orderly, neat fashion. That way when you check your work, there is something to check. Furthermore, if you find a mistake, you can correct it in your work, step by step. This is generally good advice for anyone, not just the accident prone. As problems get more and more complicated in math, if you are in the habit of writing steps down, you will be in good shape, you won't have to learn to write steps down at the same time you are learning harder math.

People who drive badly must learn to drive slowly and carefully. People who make mistakes in mathematics need to slow down and be careful too.

The problem is yours. Think about it. Come up with actions you can do to minimize stupid mistakes. It is worth the effort. If you make lots of stupid mistakes now, you will probably continue for the rest of your life. If you learn to deal with them now, you save yourself a lot of agony for the rest of your life.