

## Strategies to Increase Confidence in the Classroom: A Problem Solver

The single best fulfillment that a teacher can witness in a learner is self-confidence. Although many students are capable of solving problems and thinking critically, they often don't possess the confidence to display those capabilities. Convincing students that they can think critically can be a major challenge, especially non-traditional students. My students struggle with simple logic concepts, which results in overthinking accounting problems and missing small, but important, details.

As an accounting instructor, I frequently encounter students who have math anxiety. Many students are unaware that accounting is about logical thinking, and the term "crunching numbers" simply means that most accountants use a calculator. Problem solving and critical thinking are the keys to learning accounting, and, unbelievably, the math comes later! I love explaining to students that the greatest assets they will use and get the most value from in my class are critical-thinking skills. The first lesson in accounting is: Assets (Brain) = Liabilities (course grades) + Owner's Equity (critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities).

The main goal for any teacher is to encourage improvement and better learning outcomes. Therefore, the main goal of my accounting courses is to improve students' critical-thinking skills so they have a better chance of being improved problem solvers. In order to prepare for an upcoming term, I reflect on the pros and cons of the learning approaches I used in previous terms. The following ideas are effective strategies I have used to increase students' self-confidence and to affirm their abilities. They can be used in different manners depending on the discipline, but the underlying concepts remain the same.

### Positive Affirmation

Positive words affirm students' abilities and improve their self-esteem in the classroom. I start each class with a positive statement to improve the desired outcomes.

- "You are a critical thinker!"
- "You can explain the chapter to the class today!"
- "You can be a great team player today!"
- "You can complete the homework by using what you learn in class!"

The goal is not to get students in the mood to participate, but instead, to encourage positive thinking and make them aware of the confidence I have in them.

### Eliminate Stage Fright

Previously, I used to work problems out on the whiteboard for students, asking at the end, "Does everyone understand what I just explained?" Of course, the answer is unanimously, "Yes," although I know that's not the truth for everyone. The truth depends on each student's approach to learning. Because not all students learn in the same manner, using a kinesthetic approach can help them think more critically when solving problems.

- Consider having students work out their own problems on the board.
- Try having students teach a lesson to a few of their peers or to you, their teacher. This adds a bit of pressure and encourages them to meet higher standards.

### Collaborative Learning

Everything is better in twos, and learners can benefit from the strengths of their peers. Students already engage in collaborative learning simply by taking classes with other students and participating in class assignments. However, many students do not insist on accountability from their peers because they don't know how.

- Create a healthy debate among students to enhance their abilities. Make a game out of challenging students to develop the best problem-solving ideas that work best for their class.
- Use more group assignments with smaller groups of two to three individuals in which all group members receive the same grade. Once students realize everyone in their group will receive the same grade, they tend to work harder and more efficiently. This strategy helps students hold themselves accountable, while at the same time making sure the group remains accountable and responsible.

After practicing these strategies in my courses for several semesters, I noticed a change in my introductory course students when compared to my upper-level accounting students. As a teacher, you will see students mature, grow in assertiveness and assurance, and gain overall self-confidence.

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