

Parachute Essay #3 – 3.091

This semester I decided to take 3.091 (Solid State Chemistry) which I have found to be a particularly difficult subject. In fact, I would say the most difficult subject that I am taking this term. However, something that Professor Sadoway said in the first class really struck me. He said, that it's not all about the grades, and that it's more important to enjoy the topic and show that you are taking an interest in the subject matter and really making an effort to learn the material.

So I was really enjoying learning all about crystal structure and solid state chemistry, and I felt like I was understanding most of it – I think I'm quite good at visualizing chemical processes and understanding how they work. Every time I was called upon to do a calculation on the black board, I could usually work it out mostly by myself if not with a little assistance from the recitation leader. However, the problem sets were impossible.

Every time I attempted a problem set question, I would only get so far before realizing that I required a certain constant or experimentally derived value that was not given in the question data, as if I was supposed to have just plucked it out of thin air. I could not know whether I was supposed to have looked up or derived by myself the mystery numbers by myself until I had spent a great deal of time and frustration already. I found this constant repetition irritating and made it nearly impossible to complete or even make any progress on my 3.091 problem sets. This, in turn, made it all the more difficult to absorb in the material.

After failing my first exam, I quickly sprung into action doing everything I could to try to get on top of the subject material so that I could pass the next exam. I went to all the office hours my schedule would allow and made a real effort to complete the problem sets to the best of my ability. I even went to the tutoring services room (TSR) to get help on occasions, which I usually found to be quite useful. Several weeks went by of intense study in an effort to pass the next exam... and I failed it.

I feel like I understand the material, and I enjoy learning about it. However, I just cannot seem to do well on the exams. One thing I did not mention before is that since I started at MIT, I have been experiencing test panic – a concept that was completely foreign to me before, and therefore all the more terrifying to experience for the first time during my first exam. So this also factored into the inaccuracy of my test scores, misrepresenting my true understanding of the material.

I just hope that if things don't go so well on the final and I'm right on the 50% line, Professor Sadoway will pass me because of my efforts to do well in his class. I think I've made it fairly evident to my recitation leader and all my peers that I've really put in an effort, and I think this puts me in a good light that may possibly have the power of persuasion when my final grade is decided.