tampabay.com Know it now.

An attention grabber

By JENNIFER STEVENS
Published January 22, 2006

"To begin, we need to recall two basic facts about the derivative f (x) of a function f (x). The value f (a) of f (x) at x=a is the slope of . . ."

I wondered what professor What's-His-Name would look like skiing down the slopes of the Rockies. He wouldn't be graceful, of course; he would waddle up to the edge - as far as he could without falling - and then hurtle down the hill, stopping only when he became ensnared in the labyrinth of bright orange netting.

I laughed out loud.

Several other students turned around, raising their eyebrows and wrinkling their foreheads, making them look much older than college freshmen. I slumped in my desk. Concentrate, Jen.

"Note that rough estimates are the best we can do; it is difficult to measure the slope of the tangent accurately without using a grid and a ruler, so we couldn't reasonably expect two people's estimates to agree."

I pictured two numbers shaking hands. The professor separated the numbers with a division sign.

I looked at the carpet, a swirl of blues, purples, and grays. Out of all the carpets in the world, someone chose this one; someone thought that this dreary mixture would be the perfect complement to the math and physics classrooms. Or did they purposely choose shades of melancholy to prevent students from the brilliant inspiration that comes from solid color?

What is my favorite color? I would tend to say green, but was that really my favorite color? My bedroom has crimson sheets and candles and picture frames, but my closet embraces shades of green and orange and pink. Does this mean I like four colors equally and that society has asked me to choose only one?

I forced my head upright, eyes directed at the teacher, just like everyone else. His button is going to pop - the fourth button from the collar. It is the only thing holding together that thin layer of white cotton and preventing the exposure of pasty, dimpled flab.

I looked at my notebook and discovered the life of a previous student beneath the faded manila backing: "John Loves Leslie." I pictured a strong, handsome man caressing a beautiful blond and whispering, "I love you, Leslie." But a strong and handsome man would never spend the time carving letters into a wooden desk. John was probably a short, skinny kid with wire-rimmed glasses, pining over a girl he would never get. He spent an entire class period carving this declaration, hoping that one day Leslie might sit here and learn that John loved her. But she did not know who John was and concluded that the message was meant for another Leslie. Poor John.

My eyes drifted to my worn, black backpack. I noticed a translucent orange cylinder peeking out of it.

I forgot to take my Adderall. And you can't spell Adderall without A-D-D.

I bent over and retrieved one of the tiny tangerine pills. I chased the tablet with Aquafina and waited to feel its effects.

"So what can we say about the coefficient's influence on the x-coordinate of this intersection point?"

I pictured the professor packed inside a red Miata, sluggishly approaching an intersection. As the light changed from yellow to red, my daydream slowly faded away.

- Jennifer Stevens, who grew up in Pasco County, is a recent graduate of the University of Central Florida.

Contact the Times | Privacy Policy | Standard of Accuracy | Terms, Conditions & Copyright