

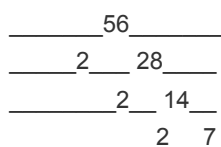
Happy Friday, everyone, and welcome back to the GMAT Tip of the Week! We here on the editorial team would describe ourselves and our roles primarily as “teachers,” and what do teachers do? They teach. And your author plans to spend the weekend teaching, but as a break from teaching Algebra and Data Sufficiency, this weekend he’ll be teaching a 5-year old to ski. And what both of them learn can teach you to be a better GMAT test taker.

There are a few pillars of ski instruction, most notably:

- 1) Quick memory devices for the basics
- 2) An understanding that the student will fall down repeatedly, but hopefully get up having learned something
- 3) The notion that someone can be told what to do, but in order to truly become adept they’ll need to feel what to do

And all of these are true of the GMAT. With skiing, most students learn “french fries” for going downhill (point your skis parallel so that they look like two french fries) and “pizza” for slowing down (forming a triangle wedge with your skis to slow momentum). Beginners often repeat these mantras to themselves while getting the hang of it (cue the South Park episode...Marsh the Darsh!), but by the time they’re cruising blue-square runs they’re going more on feel. This needs to be a part of your GMAT preparation, too. There are plenty of beginner devices to help you learn and memorize basic skills, including:

Factor Trees – What are the factors of 56? Use a factor tree:



When you terminate each “branch” once it reaches a prime number, your factor tree is complete. The prime factors of 56 are $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 7$.

But much like pizza/french fries, if you’re thinking rigidly about factor trees you’re likely missing opportunities to truly excel. 56 is quite quickly 7×8 , and you should know that $8 = 2^3$. With just about any 2-digit number you should be able to quickly recognize the prime factorization and get to work on the rest of the problem. Pizza, french fries, factor trees, and other quick-memory devices are great teaching tools...but if you’re going to excel at something you need to get past the mnemonic devices as often as possible having used them as a springboard to understanding and “feeling”.

Ski instruction also hinges on one’s ability to fall down and get back up. Those who simply refuse to let themselves fall never stray much past the bunny slopes or take their paths past perpendicular-to-the-hill. This mentality is prevalent in GMAT study, as well – beginning students often lament their “percent correct” or their pacing. But remember — you’re learning. And the best way to learn is through lasting lessons — those that come from a bruise on your backside or a lingering frustration in your mind that “they’ll never trick me by making me forget about negatives again!” GMAT students simply must let themselves make mistakes — and learn from them.

The GMAT is a test that is built upon mistakes — the authors of the test research and anticipate the mistakes that people frequently make, and construct question designed to bait you into them. To succeed, you must know yourself as well as you know the content — you need to know where you’ve been prone to falling down before so that you can stop yourself from falling down in that same way again. Each mistake you make — each time you fall down — is an opportunity for you to learn. Don’t worry about your correctness-percentage today; instead, focus on the percentage of mistakes from which you learn something lasting. 10 mistakes and 10 improvements is a great way to learn; 5 mistakes and no improvements...that’s going to leave a mark.