

PATCH 12 – THE PERTNEAR

By Tom Mikel,

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Image by Jeff Kingma from Pixabay



Image by Here and now, unfortunately, ends my journey on Pixabay from Pixabay

*“So why punish students for failure? I get that we have to have a means to approve who is successful and ready to go on, and grading is a means of measuring that. But remember, there is a difference between a flat out failure and a pertnear. Of course some students are going to be ‘**pertfar**’ for whatever reason and won’t be able to pass the course. A pertnear, is that student who does try and just maybe cannot quite connect the pieces, **yet**. They can and will be successful. **They just need a chance to do it wrong first, reflect and then improve.**”*

This concept resonated with me because I find many students are afraid to try if they aren’t sure they’ll end up with the correct answer. I ask them to show all their calculations, so I can see their thinking process and give part marks for the good stuff and indicate where they went wrong. Many students seem to prefer multiple choice questions rather than short answer, but actually do better on the short answer questions because they can receive part marks when they’re **pertnear**.

Being **pertnear** at first is often the first step before getting the correct answer(s) and recognizing that a student is **pertnear** and giving part-marks can often give them the courage to persist and achieve the correct answer later on. This is crucial to success in chemistry and math and life in general! If we don’t recognize and subsequently support students’ learning from the **pertnears**, there is potential for students to walk away and say “I can’t do math (or chemistry)” which creates a barrier to future learning and perhaps their dream career!

Many students in my courses are mature, have had difficulty in academics previously, and/or are embarking on a second career. They lack confidence in their abilities in subjects like math and chemistry. Recognizing when they are **pertnear** and encouraging them to persevere builds their confidence to understand the material and complete the course. I teach in a competitive program where marks determine acceptance into target programs, and many students are extremely hard on themselves and this stress can interfere with learning. Given that pre-health is a preparatory program, I try to offer multiple low stakes assessment opportunities so that **pertnears** can provide steppingstones towards success.



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