

How could I be wrong?

Although this exercise deals with numbers, it could conceivably be used in any class to illustrate how past experience, expectations, and the impact of a group affect a class. It also illustrates a common source of errors in mathematics, i.e., carelessness.

Copy the list of numbers below to a board, or some form of display. Cover the numbers prior to the arrival of your students. Starting at the top, reveal one number at a time and ask the class to mentally add each number to the prior numbers, and quickly say the answer out loud. When you uncover the last number, don't be surprised to hear the answer "6000" rather than "5100."

Ask the class why some people obtained the incorrect answer? Perception? Past experience? Expectations? Too hasty? Unlike the total for the numbers, we find no one correct answer to the question of why. However, the exercise does provide your class a reminder that errors can happen, even to people as intelligent as this class.

1000
1000
20
1000
40
1000
30
1000
10