

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Value of Being Confused

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No one likes to feel confused, but could there actually be benefits to confusion? In this informational text, Barrett Smith explores why feeling confused is actually a good thing. As you read, take notes on how people respond to confusion.

[1] We've all felt confused before, and it can be one of the most frustrating feelings to deal with. Students might be confused about how to do a math problem or finish a project. Young people might be confused about who they are and what to do in the future. No matter what is making us confused, the feeling of not knowing what the answers or solutions are can make us feel useless, stupid, and cause us to worry.



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A lot of people are hard on themselves and others when there's a lack of understanding. People often tend to think the person who has all of the answers is smarter than the one who asks

a lot of questions. Because of the negative judgment that surrounds confusion, people often try to hide their confusion in a variety of ways. Instead of admitting or accepting that they don't have the solution, people sometimes try to pretend they have the answers. At other times, people make educated guesses or create an answer even if they know it isn't right.

Students are often guilty of hiding their lack of understanding. If confused about a topic in school, they might pretend to know the answers. They can sometimes be embarrassed to ask questions. As young individuals, they can be confused about who they are, and might try harder to behave in a particular way. They can be too embarrassed to explore other groups or identities, afraid perhaps of being called a "wannabe". They can be afraid people will know they're confused.

But confusion might actually be a good thing. When we jump to an answer, we don't have time to explore and understand the thing we're confused about. Fighting confusion ends up making us more confused. Instead of fighting or trying to ignore your confusion, accepting it and taking the opportunity to analyze what's confusing can benefit our learning. In fact, scientific studies show that confusion actually leads to deeper understanding. A 2004 study explored six moods that people feel while learning, including frustrated, bored, and confused. They found that students who spent more of the lesson confused learned the most. In another study, published in 2014, scientists tried to confuse students by giving them contradicting¹ information. Students who expressed confusion during the lesson did better on the final test. Based on these studies, scientists believe being confused is a step to learning. Not knowing the answer to a problem gives us space to look at different ways to solve it. The feeling of confusion also motivates us to look more deeply into the problem. In the end, this helps us understand the topic on a deeper level.

1. **Contradicting (noun):** something that is opposite to something else

- [5] Confusion isn't just an important step to learning in school, it's also important for learning who you are. Psychologists call that sense of who you are identity. Your identity can involve being part of groups like race, gender, subcultures.² Identity is also made up of your values and goals. People figure out their identity in two steps. The first step is exploration, where you try out different groups and values and see what fits. The next step is commitment, when you decide firmly about some parts of your identity. Exploring your identity can feel very confusing. You might be afraid that people will judge you for going through different phases or not committing to a group. But phases are completely natural. A study published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Development* found that people who do the most exploring about who they are have better outcomes such as higher self-esteem later in life. Confusion gives us the space to try new things and be creative. Allowing ourselves to be confused and ask questions leads to deeper understanding, more learning, and higher self-confidence. So, try not to be embarrassed when you're confused about something. Instead of trying to hide or fight your confusion, try to resolve it by trying new things. Embrace the confusion and explore different solutions to your problem. Sometimes being confused is hard, not just because we judge ourselves, but because it can be frustrating. When we try over and over to understand something without making any progress, we can feel defeated and stop caring, and eventually give up. Trying a new method, asking for help, or researching different ways to approach the problem online can all be great resources to work through your confusion. Before you give up, make sure you have someone to help you and the resources you need to resolve your confusion.

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2. a cultural group within a larger culture