I went to a mathematics school as I always recorded excellent scores in maths from a young age. I believed I was a naturally gifted student; thus, I expected a simple and smooth period at school. However, contrary to my expectations, the school was more competitive and rigorous than I had imagined. In the second year, I was almost giving up on achieving academic success as the pressure was becoming too much. Nonetheless, I was able to finish the program thanks to my good friend Martin. I learned how to be humane, strategic, and the true meaning of friendship from Martin. I remain eternally grateful for the lessons he taught me and his friendship.

Students in the school were very competitive. The students also appeared to be always in a hurry, running to different places, much like soldiers in barracks do. I was quickly taken through the induction and taken to class, where I joined other students as we awaited our first class. In the disturbing silence of the classroom, one boy stood up, went to the front of the classroom, looked at us and said, “Hello, guys, I am Martin…” and just before he finished, a lady walked in and introduced herself as the teacher. “I see someone wants to take my spot,” she teased Martin, after which we all burst into laughter much from the tension we felt than her joke. She would take us through our first period. The classes took off quickly, and we stratified into groups based on our inclinations.
While we were all good in academics, Martin was brilliant. We could not match his speed or accuracy; thus, he topped the class all the time. While I was accurate, I was not nearly as fast and was jealous of his speed (‘@9) (‘@3) (‘@1). He would finish his class tasks before all of us and walk out proudly, leaving us in our slow-moving misery (‘@8). One afternoon, I asked Martin what his secret was. He paused for a second, looked at me, and said, “I read ahead.” “You read ahead?” I asked, puzzled. “Multiple times, on my fourth reread on calculus now,” he replied in his typical haughtiness. That Friday, I went home, looked at the syllabus, and spent the entire weekend studying what would be covered the next week. On Monday, as Martin handed in his paper for the in-class assessment, I stood up and handed mine also (‘@1). He looked at me and smiled. It was the beginning of a long friendship that would last through our entire period in math school. We became close friends, and school work ultimately became more manageable when we began collaborating (‘@3). We both relied on each other and encouraged each other, and together we made it through math school (‘@2) (‘@2).

As we walked out of our final paper, I asked him why he shared his secret willingly despite knowing I was his competition for the class top spot (‘@2) (‘@1). Martin looked at me and said, “I needed a friend more than I needed competition.” Besides, he went on, “You could never beat me….” However, I already knew that. Behind his veil of arrogance and self-importance, Martin was a good human being who would not let the competition get in the way of helping out a person in need. He had not only earned my respect, but had also taught me a valuable lesson that day. I remain grateful for his friendship and the lessons I picked along the way from him (‘@1).