Common Pre-Algebra Mistakes
Example: Subtracting Fractions

The Goal

Simplify:

$$\frac{1}{3} - 1$$

The Mistake

$$\frac{1}{3} - 1 = -\frac{1}{3}$$

Need a hint? Look carefully at the red part of the algebra:

$$\frac{1}{3} - 1 = -\frac{\textcolor{red}{1}}{3}$$

The Correction

$$\frac{1}{3} - 1 = \frac{1}{3} - \frac{3}{3} = \frac{1-3}{3} = -\frac{2}{3}$$

An Explanation

Use care with fractions. A good strategy is to *write down* intermediate steps, which makes you take the time needed to compute correctly.
(It is possible that the student mistakenly *multiplied* the fraction by -1 instead of performing a subtraction.)