

ADVICE ON SUBMITTING HOMEWORK

A homework exercise is not only an important contributor to what you learn in a class, but is often an important part of your grade as well. From a student's point of view, homework is usually the first time the information from the course is used, and thus is a very valuable early feedback mechanism that helps the student prepare for exams.

Although the professor will usually make an honest attempt to grade the homework completely objectively and solely on the basis of content, unfortunately, most homeworks require some judgement to evaluate. This means that the presentation of your homework can have a significant impact on the amount of time needed to grade, and ultimately, on your grade that you receive. Thus it is to your advantage, as well as your professor's, for you to do your best to make your homework not only correct, but easy to grade. Following is a list of suggestions for making your homework easier to grade.

1. **Print Homework Legibly**

You can turn your homework in either written in cursive, printed, or typed. Unfortunately, most of our cursive writing is difficult to read, at least for others if not for ourselves. Submitting homework that is written in cursive risks losing points for correct answers that the professor cannot read. Hard-to-read cursive also guarantees the professor will be in a bad mood while grading your homework, which cannot do anything but hurt your grade. Carefully printed or typed homework, on the other hand, will enable the professor to more easily see *where* you went wrong so that you can receive more partial credit, will guarantee that you receive credit for all correct answers, and will increase your chances of getting the benefit of the doubt.

2. **Always Recopy Your Homework**

Recopying your homework will allow you to focus on legibility as a final step. Not only that, but recopying will give you a chance to catch the silly little errors that creep into homework when your concentration is on the complicated ideas rather than the old familiar ones.

3. **Use White Space**

Homework that is cramped and crowded on a page makes it difficult for the professor to give you feedback in the form of comments. Leaving several blank lines between each answer, and including reasonably sized margins will encourage comments that may make the difference between getting a similar question correct on the exam and getting it incorrect.

4. **Staple Multiple Pages**

Submitting several unstapled pages of homework carries with it an implicit demand that the professor keep your pages organized. Simple courtesy, if not concern for your grade, will suggest that you not force your professor to do this part of your job.

5. **Do Not Submit Homework on Paper With Ragged Edges**

Paper torn from spiral notebooks are cumbersome to file, carry, and organize. Submitting homework on this kind of paper makes your professor's life more difficult at a time when you most need good will.

6. **Print Your Name Clearly**

You put your name on your homework so that you can receive credit for your homework, not to sign off on a statement or legal document. Therefore the same comments about legibility presented above apply. Do not be concerned that your professor needs your signature; when you become a big name celebrity, the knowledge that the professor contributed to your education will be more valuable than a signed piece of paper. Also, don't forget to print your name on each page, just in case the staple falls out.

7. **Don't Omit Steps**

When you leave steps out, you are asking the professor to take on faith that you understand the material, rather than that you made a lucky guess. Another way of putting this is that you are

asking the professor to make an assumption that you know the material as a basis for evaluating your knowledge of the material! Even worse, if you get the answer wrong, you force the professor to assign a zero, rather than give partial credit for understanding at least some of the problem.

8. **Avoid Grade Grubbing**

One of the most painful parts of being a professor is talking to students who are unhappy about their grades. You should avoid asking for more leniency on homeworks unless it really matters, and when doing so, you should be very careful to take the right approach. Don't accuse the professor of being "unfair", "biased", or "unjust", even if you think he or she is. Rather, suggest that your presentation or the specific problem was such that the evaluation did not accurately reflect your knowledge and abilities, and you would like to explain your answer further. Of course, these comments do not apply to miscalculations or clear mistakes, you should always bring those to your professor's attention.

—*Dr. Jeff Offutt*