

Guidelines for Writing-Up “Regular Homework” Assignments

You will have many assignments that require a formal write-up, where you will carefully think about how to explain your thinking to others. For the regular homework after every class, however, your main audience is yourself – but not only yourself today, this minute, but also yourself in the future (which can be measured in hours, days, months, years etc.)

Here are some questions to think about regarding this homework:

- If I did this homework on say, Saturday, and Monday is a holiday, will I be able to quickly review it before or during class on Wednesday and know what the questions were and how I answered them? If we go over homework in groups, will I be able to explain to my group what I did?
- If I were studying for a test in a month, could I tell what problem I was working on? Could I tell where I got stuck or what I did to solve the problem?
- When I go to do my portfolio in May, will I be able to use this piece of material to document my work? The portfolio can show signs of progress etc, so everything in it is not necessarily correct or outstanding, and there is also an essay where more explanation can be included.
- Suppose the same problem comes up in my class on teaching math to children a year or two from now, and I vaguely remember that I did that problem, although I’m not sure it was exactly the same one, and I don’t have the text book any more. Could I go through my notebook and figure it out?
- Suppose I am studying for the math portion of the state teacher test, which I need to pass to graduate from Wheelock. I realize that I have forgotten material from this unit and start reviewing my notes. Will they make sense?
- Suppose I am in my first teaching job and the teacher in the next room is looking for a problem on a topic, and I remember that we did many problems on that topic in this class. Could I go back to my notebook and find something that might help out that teacher?

Some things your homework must include:

- Enough description of the problem so that you can tell what the problem was, without any additional texts or handouts. You do not

have to copy the problem or even use complete sentences for the regular homework, but you need to include the relevant information.

- Evidence that you engaged with the problem. You won't be able to solve every problem, but make it clear what you did. Depending on personal style, you might want to use separate scrap paper or do the work on the final paper. You shouldn't make your final write-up of the problems interfere with your engagement in the problem, but when you are done with the problem, you can annotate somehow to remind yourself what you were doing, if it isn't clear from your work.
- Clear description of where you are leaving off the problem. If you have a solution, be sure you can tell what it is. If you don't have a solution (or it's not a problem that calls for a solution), be sure to explain where you are stuck, what you were thinking, etc.

Turning in regular homework:

- When we are done using the homework in class, on most days we will randomly decide, with probability $1/3$, whether the homework is turned in or not (I reserve the right to change the probability to 0 or 1 on some days).
- When I look at this homework, I will only be looking for the three things described above: description of the problem, evidence of engagement, and description of how you are leaving the problem. I will not be grading these assignments on how many you got correct or wrong. The purpose of turning in this work is to encourage you to make your work into a useful record of your work in this course – it is primarily about working on your written communication, not on the other goals for the course (problems solving, etc.... you will have other assignments that focus on them).
- Most regular homework will simply get a check mark. I will grade them fairly quickly and return promptly. I might make comments. If the homework does not show evidence of the three areas I'm looking for, it'll get a check minus. If I see something done exceptionally well, it'll get a check plus.
- These regular homework assignments are only 5% of your grade. If you get checks on almost all of them, you'll get an A for this part of your grade. If you get some check plusses, they will help you out if your final grade is close between two letters.
- Of course, I said that your primary audience is yourself and I am grading these papers; I understand that at some level this is a contradiction. However, I also know that if your homework simply says, "1) 4; 2) prime; 3) $x=7$," that it does not meet the criteria. As I get to know you better, I hope to be able to balance allowing you your own personal style with helping you make your work a more useful record.