

Digest 5

(A compilation of emailed homework questions, answered around Tuesday.)

Question. (From the TA): Question 3 on Q5 seems incorrect.

Answer. Thanks, it should be fixed now.

Question. (From a student): I am unhappy with my exam performance. What can I do to improve?

Answer. This is going to be a long answer, so before I begin, I'm going to restate how the final course grade is computed (copied from the syllabus):

“The final course grade is weighted as the larger of the following two schemes. Scheme 1: online homework (5%), quizzes (10%), the first midterm (20%), the second midterm (25%), and the final (40%). Scheme 2: online homework (5%), quizzes (10%), largest midterm grade (35%), final (50%). The grade for the semester will be curved.”

So, as you can see, even if you did poorly on the first midterm, you can still get an A in the class (because of Scheme 2). So, you don't have to get worried about your final course grade at the moment. However, if you are unhappy with your performance, I would encourage you to take this as an introspective opportunity to improve your studying habits. Certainly no one is perfect and we can all improve our studying habits in some way.

Now, let's start with the basics. Success in any college class begins with the following things:

- Always attending class, coming on time, and staying for the whole duration of class.
- Paying attention in class (not talking with your neighbors, not watching videos on your phone/computer, etc.)
- Asking questions before, during, and after class, especially when you are confused.
- Getting extra help at the Math Center or by coming to my office hours.
- Completing all homework/quiz assignments days ahead of time (**not** starting them a few hours before they are due). In this class in particular, I recommend treating the quiz like a homework assignment.
- Regularly studying the material, **especially** going over topics that you found difficult, **every week**. Also, the point here is that you do **not** save all of your studying for the last 2-3 days before the exam. Studying for an exam should be a reinforcement of things you know already, allowing you to cover any gaps in your knowledge. Cramming is not a replacement for regular studying and I strongly discourage cramming the night before an exam. Actually, I recommend that you study hardest two days before an exam, but then you do light studying the day before an exam, in order to conserve energy and get a full night of sleep before the exam. Also, it is possible to

over-study for an exam (which I might call cramming), and this is why I discourage cramming.

Lastly, I think it is a good rule that you should be spending around 8-10 hours studying for a class each week, not including the time you spend in class. If you are not spending that much time on the class, then it's a good indication that maybe you are not studying enough to succeed in the class. Also, when I say 8-10 hours I mean actual focused studying, getting extra help, reviewing material, and trying a mix of easy/medium and hard problems. I don't mean reading your book while TV/Netflix/Youtube is playing, etc.

In general I'm always happy to discuss individual ways to improve your performance, though 9 out of 10 times if someone is struggling in the class, they aren't doing several of the things I described above.

I believe anyone has the ability to succeed in this class, if you are willing to work hard enough (as described above).

Finally, if you show significant improvement in your exam performance over the course of the semester, and if you are close to a grade cutoff at the end of the semester (say near the cutoff between B and B+), then before the Final Grades are set, I will adjust the grade cutoffs to give you the higher grade (in this case B+). [Determination of significant improvement is at my sole discretion.] That is, improvement will be rewarded (and this is already reflected to a certain extent in the grading schemes described above).