

## Midterm Time...

### PROCTORING

1. Classes technically take priority over proctoring exams. However, if your professor needs you to proctor and you are unable to for some reason, it's YOUR responsibility to find someone else to do it. If you can't, alert your professor (well ahead of time).
2. Proctoring is pretty straightforward. You're there primarily to answer questions and discourage cheating. Answering questions means you should clarify if directions are unclear. You should not indicate how to solve any of the problems or if the students are "on the right track." A good rule of thumb: If you have to look at a student's own work to answer a question, it's probably something you shouldn't answer. If you think someone may be cheating, tell your professor<sup>1</sup>.

### ETIQUETTE

A little bit about exam-grading etiquette, just to make everyone's lives easier.

1. The TAs should figure out a schedule for who is grading which problems and when exams will be handed off from one TA to the other. It is **not okay** to leave exams sitting on your office desk in plain view. It is okay to put exams in your co-TA's mailbox if you cannot hand them off in person. If your co-TA is in one of the larger offices that are frequently open, you should ask if it's okay to place them inside their desk. These hand-off details should be settled on the day of the exam or during the weekly meeting that precedes it.
2. Decide who will split up the exams by section (version), or whether you will have the students turn in their exams by section (version). Decide on who, if anyone, will alphabetize exams within each section to make entering grades and returning exams easier.
3. Decide which TA will grade last and enter the grades into the course spreadsheet and return the exams to the other TAs. This TA should make sure to share the spreadsheet with co-TAs and the instructor. Entering grades onto a spreadsheet is (sadly) one avenue by which students can be screwed and have no idea about it. I *strongly* recommend that you double-check your data entry after all the scores are entered to ensure no typos. In a stack of 200 exams it is *so* easy for one or two scores to be mis-entered. Entering grades takes time. Work out an arrangement whereby the grade entering responsibilities are shared evenly or otherwise compensated for.
4. All the TAs for the course should email their comments to their course colleagues. If there was a common mistake that you deducted 3 points for, let them know. If 85% of students wrote " $\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \frac{\sin x}{x} = \boxed{\sin}$ ", that's probably something that you should bring to people's attention.

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<sup>1</sup>academic dishonesty is something we will touch on in a later meeting

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## GRADING

Some professors will give you a “suggested” set of grading policies. Most will simply let you create your own grading rubric. It’s a good idea to ask the professor if they have any preferences about grading: what to be picky about, where to give partial credit, etc...

Regardless, you want to find a balance among the following three universal virtues: Accuracy, Consistency, and Efficiency.

### 1. Accuracy:

- (a) Before grading, briefly look at ten or fifteen exams to get a better feeling for common mistakes, and consider the corresponding partial credit points you’ll award.
- (b) You may want to assign partial credit points based on your answers to the following: What is this question looking for? Is it more computational or conceptual? Are there multiple ways to do the problem?
- (c) While grading, write comments on the exams to (i) correct students’ errors and (ii) explain possibly ambiguous marks you’ve given.

### 2. Consistency:

- (a) Once you’ve assigned partial credit points to responses you believe will be common errors, be sure to write them down. Then refer to your rubric often, making small refinements as you go.
- (b) When an unforeseen error arises, write down the points you award it. It’s likely you’ll see that error again before you’re done.

### 3. Efficiency. An exam should not generally take you more than 300 hours to grade.<sup>2</sup> A few time-saving tips:

- (a) Organize exams by version, if there are multiple versions of the exam.
- (b) Grade only a couple problems at a time, depending on complexity.
- (c) Refer to your expanding rubric often. Try to avoid “feeling” your way through grading.
- (d) Don’t get bogged down.

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<sup>2</sup>Realistically, 10 hours is usually the upper bound

## HANDING BACK EXAMS

Your professor may have a system for this already. If they don't, I recommend the following:

1. When section begins, put on the board the class average and any grading curve information you have (it's likely you will have no curve information, in which case you should tell them that). Put it on the side and leave it up for the entire hour.
2. Wait a minute. If you have any non-exam-related comments to make, make those now. Try and let the last few stragglers get into the room before you hand back exams. Hand back the exams by calling out names, not by passing around the stack. Then give the students a few minutes to look over their marked exams. While they are looking over their exam, ask them to make sure their score is totaled correctly. Also, use this time to inform the students of the department's re-grade policy (see below). After this time, if a student wants a re-grade, they should write a note explaining their case for more points. Alternatively, you could tell the student to come discuss it with you during office hours. Remember, whenever possible, the TA who graded the contested problem should have the final decision<sup>3</sup>.
3. **Math Department re-grade policy.** After handing back exams, tell students that *once an exam leaves the room, there is no longer the possibility of a regrade for that exam*. In other words, if they want to request a re-grade, they should give the exam to you before they roll out. Furthermore, they **cannot** write on their exam – they should write a note describing their concern / complaint on a separate sheet of paper. Once they write on their actual exam, they lose the right to ask for a re-grade<sup>4</sup>. Tell them they can bring the exams to you at the end of section if they have any concerns about the grading. (You may end section just a *few* minutes early to allow those students time to speak with you one-on-one.)
4. If the professor has not already presented the exam solutions, you should be ready to do so. If you don't think the whole exam merits a step-by-step summary, focus on the harder problems. While doing this, I like to emphasize common mistakes. *Also, if you or another TA had a potentially confusing or controversial grading scheme for one of the problems, you should explain that here, too.*<sup>5</sup> You may also want to advise students to take notes so they can compare your solutions to their own.
5. Use the remaining time to talk about homework, etc.

How you organize your sections for returning exams has the same effect as your first day of section: it sets a precedent and lets students know how things will run. If you return exams and cover the grading in a haphazard manner, students may not hear the details of

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<sup>3</sup>you might just want to have a little re-grade meeting with the other TAs, when you can swap exams back and forth easily

<sup>4</sup>one of the most common ways students try to cheat is by doctoring their returned exams and then asking for "re-grades"

<sup>5</sup>this will greatly reduce the number of individual questions you get later

the re-grade policy, or think it's okay to talk over you, or worse<sup>6</sup>.

When it comes to the re-grades themselves, they're pretty much at your discretion. A couple of thoughts:

1. You should re-grade the problems you graded on the exam, and only those problems. Re-grades should be returned to students in the following week's sections.
2. Re-grades beget more re-grades. If you're a big softie on the first quiz or midterm, students will learn, and will harass you even more after the second midterm. Taking a hard line early helps to prevent this cycle.
3. United we stand. You may very well disagree with how your professor writes exams, or how your fellow TA graded #4. But it's nevertheless important to *act as a professional team with your colleagues, and back them up if necessary*. Expressing frustration about the prof or other TAs in front of your students not only reflects badly on everyone, it also gives students the idea that they can "divide and conquer" to get a better grade, which we obviously want to avoid.

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<sup>6</sup>they may think you won't notice if they make minor "adjustments" to their solutions