

Mathematics Homeworks: Continuous Assessment Guidelines for First Year Students

Imagine: taking a physical education degree and not doing sports whatsoever. Unthinkable, isn't it?

Now *you* are enrolled on a Mathematics degree. It would be equally unthinkable that you would not *do* Mathematics! The brain is a muscle, and exercising it makes it grow, just like any other muscle (for an illustration, please visit <http://abstrusegoose.com/371>). Doing Mathematics means doing lots of (sometimes challenging) exercises. We provide you with those exercises in the form of weekly homework assignments, for every course you are enrolled on. We also spend a lot of time marking these assignments and providing you with feedback, so that you know where you are and how you are doing. That's a second benefit for you.

This process is called *formative assessment*, and it implies that the marks you get do not count towards your final mark. Rather, they give you an indication of your progress. You're also free to make mistakes. That's good: the more mistakes you make during the year the fewer you'll be likely to make on the exam.

Sadly, we don't live in an ideal world. A major drawback of purely formative assessment is that the number of homework submissions drops dramatically as term progresses. Therefore, to stimulate daily work, we subject homework submissions to an additional *continuous assessment procedure*, where

every *reasonable* attempt is rewarded with an extra mark for the course.

Here's the deal:

You are required to do every homework assignment for every course you are enrolled on and submit them. When your submission constitutes a "reasonable attempt" you will receive a mark for it; otherwise, or if you submit too late, or if you don't submit at all, you will not get that mark.

The problem sheets' contribution to the final mark for the course is 10%, and is calculated by:

$$10 * (\text{Number of reasonable attempts}) / (\text{Number of Problem Sheets}).$$

What is a reasonable attempt?

Let's keep it simple: the amount of work involved per assignment is roughly 2 hours. You get the mark if your submission shows that you have invested these 2 hours. If your submission looks like something that could have been scribbled down in 5 minutes, you won't get the mark.

Note that *the burden of proof is on you!*

More precisely, a reasonable attempt means:

1. You answer the majority of questions; and just copying the question does not count as an answer.
2. If you don't find the correct answer to a question, don't just write nothing, but show us everything you tried, even if it did not lead to a complete solution.
3. Show us that you sought extra help.
4. No plagiarism! Your answer should not be a word-by-word copy of the solution sheet you may have got from a friend. It should not be a word-by-word copy of the homework of one of your friends! We do encourage that you work together, but you should *write up in your own words!*
5. Work that is submitted more than 24 hours late and without mitigating circumstances will not be judged a reasonable attempt.

What if you get ill?

If you cannot submit your assignment in time due to illness or other mitigating circumstances, you must complete a Notification of Absence form (see the College web page <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/attendance>), send this by email to MathsAttendance@rhul.ac.uk and provide any other required documentation to the Maths Office when you get back.

This does *not* mean you no longer need to hand in that week's homeworks. Rather, a deadline extension may be granted. *You are required to hand in all assignments eventually!*

If you are ill for several days and do not return earlier than two days before the deadline, you would typically get a one-week extension. For longer periods of absence longer extensions may be granted; this will be treated on a case-by-case basis.

If you require an extension more than twice, self-certification forms no longer suffice and a Medical Certificate (from the Health Centre or your GP) is needed.

Be aware, if you get an extension you have to promise us not to look at the solution sheet. Mitigating circumstances don't give you the right to plagiarise!

Where and when do you hand in?

Normally, you hand in in class, at the end of the lecture, as specified by the lecturer of the course.

Please, STAPLE YOUR SHEETS TOGETHER so that no pages get lost or mislaid.

If you submit after the deadline, for whatever reason, you *must* hand in your work to the *Departmental Office C243, in person, during office hours*. This will allow staff to check whether your late submission is within 24 hours of the deadline or is covered by an agreed deadline extension.

If you submit work after the deadline you cannot expect to receive feedback on your work at the same time as it will be provided to students who did meet the deadline.

What if you don't know how to do a problem, or even how to start?

First and foremost, read the question carefully and make sure you understand it correctly. Many problems can come about if a question is misunderstood.

Start by looking at the lecture notes. Revise what has been covered in the past few lectures. Everything you need to do a problem will be in there. While revising, constantly ask yourself "could this paragraph be of help, and how?" Write down everything you think is relevant to the problem, and then put the pieces together.

Compare the question to the examples seen in the lectures.

If that didn't work, you should seek extra help; and plenty of help is available. We organise workshops and tutorials, where you can ask anything about your problem (except the full solution). Or go to see the lecturer during his/her office hours. And since every course has a reading list, you could also go to the library and read up on the subject in the recommended books.

What if you think your work unfairly received a 0 mark?

You can appeal, by submitting a *written account to the Maths office*, explaining why your work should merit a 1 mark. Submit further evidence of the amount of work that went into your submission, if you have it. Your appeal will be looked at by an independent person in the light of the abovementioned guidelines.

Note, however, that we will only look at your individual submission. In particular, we will NOT compare it to submissions by other students. Appeals based on comparisons with others ("X got judged reasonable, but I worked harder and did not get a reasonable attempt") will NOT be considered. You don't want X to end up with a 0 too...

This notwithstanding, if you received a 0 mark maybe that is telling you that it was not clear to us whether you worked hard on the assignment. Avoid the hassle by showing us your efforts more clearly the next time!