

# General Guidelines for Prof. Hillyard's exams

## The basics

Arrive on time and remember to bring your (charged) computer. If there is sufficient space, sit apart from your neighbors. Put away your mobile phone and set it to “do not disturb.”

## Be brief: this is not an English class

Be brief. I do not reward students for extra words. I only award points for getting the right concepts, the correct sequence, stuff like that. Do not write essays. It wastes your precious time. If you have been paying attention in class, you should have no difficulty with the concepts. Don't worry if you don't know how to spell something. Don't worry about bad grammar.

## Don't repeat a rule/definition

If I ask you to explain *why* something is true, or to give an *example* of it, there are no rewards for quoting the general rule or repeating the question. The answer to one of my questions will almost *never* be something that you can quote straight out of a book.

## Read the question

Don't answer the question you think I asked, or that—in your opinion—I should have asked. Only answer the question that I actually asked. Check that you haven't skipped any parts of the question. If you are unclear about what the question means, ***ask!***

## Question order

Generally speaking, the easier questions are the first few, gradually getting harder towards the end, where there is sometimes a “bonus” question. However, you should look at the points available for two questions before deciding which to do next (especially if you're short of time). Don't spend a disproportionate amount of time on an “easier” question for which you don't know the answer. The bonus question, if any, is there primarily to allow those for whom the rest of the exam was easy, to get extra credit to offset anything that they got wrong in the other questions. Anyone can do the bonus question but it typically “pays” less than it really deserves.

## Closed book exams

If the exam is “closed-book”, you will be allowed a single sheet of notes. If hand-written, then you can fill both sides; If printed then one side only. Whether or not the exam is on “blue books”, Blackboard, HackerRank or whatever, it is *your* responsibility to ensure that you do not use any source of information other than your brain and/or your sheet of notes. Mobile phones, tablets, computers, books must be *out of sight*. The consequence of not following this rule is likely to be severe!

So, why do I set such exams? I want to know that *you* understand the concepts, not that you can copy an answer from the internet.

## Open book exams—be careful with other people's answers

If the exam is open-book and you look up the answer to a question on StackOverflow or something similar, be sure that you check that the writer has answered the *same* question that I asked. Also, unless you are quoting Wikipedia or the class textbook, you should give attribution to the answer you use. Remember plagiarism is never acceptable.

## Check your answer

If the question asks for a numerical answer, think about it after you've chosen it. Do a back-of-the-envelope calculation. Does it make sense given the question?

## Fill-in-the blanks

Occasionally, I will set a fill-in-the-blanks question. These are hard to grade because often you will think of possibilities I didn't (I add those as good answers if they are). Or because your spelling is so far off (I usually catch those, however). But, often students will just put in any word which pops into their head. Try to think whether the word you choose is really the only possibility that makes sense in the context of the sentence. And make sure you read the whole sentence before you fill in your choice.

## Multiple answers

I use this type of question a lot. There is always partial credit and there is also always negative credit for incorrect answers. So, don't try to save time by choosing all possible answers. That will result in a zero for the question.

## Coding questions

Generally speaking, I use HackerRank for these coding questions. I try to arrange things such that each unit test exercises a particular part of the functionality that you have to work on. When you get the code to work on, it will compile. Try to make one (limited) set of changes at a time in order to keep the code compiling. Usually, if your code doesn't even compile, the *most* points you can get will be 50%. Try to satisfy the unit tests in the order that they are run (*test1*, *test2*, etc.).

## Full-screen mode

One of the features of HackerRank that I like is that it can be set to keep you in full screen mode. Any time you leave full-screen mode, or return, an event is logged. We do actually take note of these exits. If you accidentally leave talk to one of us. Even the best students make mistakes and we have to assume that you left for the purpose of looking something up. There's usually a 5-point deduction for the first offense. If you leave by accident, get back in as soon as possible and tell a TA what happened.

If the exam is on Blackboard, then you will likely be asked to use the Respondus Lockdown Browser.