

Using WeBWorK Effectively

for Math 11 students

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Online homework, such as the WeBWorK used in Math 11 and other calculus courses at Dartmouth, is an excellent way to learn because you can find out immediately whether you have done a problem correctly, rather than waiting days for homework to be graded. However, there are some pitfalls for the inexperienced. Here are some ways to make WeBWorK work for you.

1 Remember your goal.

Your goal in doing homework should not be to turn in the right answer. It should be to learn the material.

Granted, this is a rather vague and idealistic goal to keep in mind when the homework is due the next morning. Here's a more practical and concrete suggestion: Have the goal that when a similar question is asked on an exam, you will be able to answer it correctly.

Approach your homework this way and you will be on the right track.

2 Don't look for shortcuts.

Print out or copy the problem, and solve it on paper as if you were going to turn it in. (Or as if you were taking an exam.) Then input your answer.

There are several reasons for doing this: You are more likely to approach the problem correctly if you take writing it down seriously. If you make a mistake, you will be able to go back and check your work. If you don't understand something, you will have a record of what you tried and where you got stuck, and you will know what to ask at tutorial or office hours. Finally, you will have a record of your work to keep.

3 Keep a notebook.

If you followed the last bit of advice, you have a readable copy of every homework problem you did and of your solution to it. Keep those copies where you can find them. When it's time to study for an exam, you'll be glad you did.

4 Work together, ask for help, but do your own work.

You are encouraged to work together on homework, to join a study group, to come to tutorial, and to use the Tutor Clearinghouse to find individual tutoring— but the work you submit must be your own. WeBWorK makes this easy: By logging on as `practice1` (for example), you can get a version of the homework problem different from the one that will be assigned to you. Work on this in your study group, or ask your tutor for help with this. Once you have understood it, then you can do your homework problems on your own.

This is not just a matter of academic integrity and the honor principle (important as those are); it is also a matter of learning well. If you are part of a group that does a problem together, you might not always understand (or retain your understanding) as well as if you worked out the problem on your own. If you can then work a similar problem on your own, though, you know you really understand, you have reinforced that understanding, and you are more likely to remember how to do such problems.

5 Don't panic.

One incorrect WeBWorK problem is not going to have a measurable effect on your grade. Remember your goal. Learn the material. Your understanding is what really counts.