# Guidelines for Course Leaders & Learning Assistants

## Computer Science I

**Department of Computer Science & Engineering**

**University of Nebraska–Lincoln**

---

## Overview

The instructor sets policies in the syllabus which all students are expected to read, understand and adhere to. Every Course Leader (CL) and Learning Assistant (LA) is expected to read, understand and also follow these policies. Often, students will attempt to violate these policies or ask for special consideration. Do not speculate or otherwise discuss possible exceptions to these policies. Direct them to the instructor and follow up with the instructor if necessary.

- Be prepared. Be aware of the course content and expectations. You are responsible for knowing the material so that you can effectively explain and demonstrate it to students. Be able to complete the assignments, labs, etc. yourself. If you have doubts or concerns engage first with your Course Leader (CL) supervisor and/or other LAs. If you cannot resolve the issue, ask the instructor for clarification.

- Manage your time. You have made a commitment to this course and will be expected to fulfill it. Work and plan ahead. Be aware of upcoming due dates in this course as well as your own courses, research, personal obligations, etc. Plan ahead and make appropriate accommodations if you know there will be an excess of work during a period of time.

  However, your own academics should be your priority. If you feel that your commitment to this course is adversely affecting your own courses, *you need to reach out* to your Course Leader so that we can help you. Accommodations can and will be made.

## Course Structure

This course is structured with a single large lecture section with the capacity to enroll nearly 300 students. Despite the size, it is our goal to foster a greater sense of community

---

among these students in our department and in our discipline.

The course is a traditional CS1 course covering basic CS1 topics using the C programming language (offered as our traditional CSCE 155E). However, in addition to a traditional lecture, we've produced dozens of lecture/tutorial videos for students to view before and/or after lecture. We also have extensive required reading (mostly from my free textbook but also supplemental resources).

We have doubled the number of weekly lab sessions meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Tuesdays, students are paired up and expected to complete several peer programming exercises. They are expected to complete the labs in the lab time and are graded only on completion.

The second section (Thursdays) is a "hack session" in which they are allowed (and encouraged) to collaborate with as many other students as they wish. They complete small programs or pieces of code that are then submitted to our online grading system. The hacks are due the following Monday at midnight. In addition, there are be several (usually 5) programming assignments each student is expected to complete individually. There is also 1 midterm and 1 final (both are open book/note/computer and require live programming exercises).

### Online Sections

This course has multiple sections:

- Section 250 is the traditional in-person section with in-person labs and hacks, on-campus testing (during regular lecture time), etc.

- Section 700 is the online section available for all matriculating students (with no on-campus testing)

- Section 800 is the online section for Nebraska Now (no on-campus testing)

## General Responsibilities

Learning Assistants will have several responsibilities in addition to the responsibilities and expectations of the Learning Assistant program.

- Holding several office hours per week in a designated area

- Assisting in 1–2 weekly lab and hack sessions

- Grading hacks, project and exams

- Mentoring and helping students in additional office hours, hack sessions and online via Piazza

- General administrative duties (entering grades, paperwork, etc.) as needed

- Other duties may include course development, materials development (solution keys, future exercises, etc.) and other tasks identified by the instructor.

Course Leaders will have the following general responsibilities

- Supervising lab/hack sessions and assisting students in them

- Supervise grading and ensure that all assignments are graded in a timely manner

- Providing quality control (QC) by checking grading and ensuring consistency

- Holding regular office hours in a designated area

- Be in regular communication and hold weekly meetings with the instructor

# Communication

- Piazza is our primary means of communication; use it and encourage students to use it.

- If you receive email from students, answer it, but redirect them in the future to Piazza. If the question/answer would be of benefit to the class as a whole, post the question/answer to Piazza and inform the student they can find the answer there.

- For communications among instructor(s), CLs and LAs, use Piazza but make it a private message, viewable only to TAs/instructors.

- If a question has been asked/answered before, link to the original post as your answer.

- Be professional in all your communications, be courteous and helpful.

- Be prompt in answering communications. No question or email should go unanswered for more than 24 business hours.[1]

## Weekly Coordinating Meetings

Each week, we will hold regularly scheduled coordination meetings. CLs are required to attend and LAs are welcome to attend. These meetings are intended to gather and disseminate information about the past week and upcoming items. In particular, CLs should be prepared to report and discuss the following:

- How well lab/hack went: what went well, what didn't go so well and any suggestions on improvements.

- Lab attendance will be gauged via the grade book, but Hack attendance should be recorded and reported.

---

[1]Within 24 hours but only on business days, i.e. excluding weekends and holidays

- You should keep an estimate of how much time it took for 50% of the students to complete the lab.

- You should keep an estimate on office hour attendance and the common issues/questions that students are having.

- Share any other information on the course as you see fit

# Grading

### Timeline

- Hacks are generally due on Monday evenings at midnight. Randomized grading assignments are to be posted to Piazza prior to the due date/time by the instructor.

- Learning Assistants are required to have completed their assigned grading by 5PM 2 business days after each assignment due date. Upon completion, Learning Assistants should continue to available via Piazza/email for any issues that need to be resolved.

- Course Leaders should have everything reviewed and any issues resolved by 5PM 48 business hours later at which time grades will be released to students.

- If Learning Assistants face any impediments or issues to completing their grading on time, they should discuss this immediately with their CL supervisor or instructor. A Course Leader can then be called in "off the bench" to assist with grading that week.

### Instructions

- Grading is done through a combination of the online webgrader system and codepost.

- Time is limited and it should not be wasted trying to troubleshoot code that won't compile or run. If the code is ungradeable or does not compile/run then take at most 5 minutes to look over the code. If the issue can be fixed within that time frame, back up the original, fix it, note the differences (via code comments) and grade accordingly. If you cannot resolve the issue within 5 minutes, assign the student a zero and move on. This will require you to login to the command line and edit the files directly. Note that the original copy stored in the webhandin system will remain.

- Grade in accordance to the rubric through codepost. If the rubric does not address something or there is a *reasonable* uncertainty, discuss it with your CL supervisor.

- Grade in a consistent manner, both between individual assignments and with other

graders. There should not be a significant variation in points deducted or awarded for similar mistakes or work. Consistency and grading quality will be checked by your CL supervisor.

- When you deduct points, give clear and reasonably detailed reasons and justifications for doing so. Good feedback is essential for the students' learning experience. Put in efforts to provide constructive feedback and positive feedback for good work.

- Make a comment on *every* assignment you grade so that the students will know who graded it. This comment should be substantial and positive regardless of how the student performed. If poorly, suggest strategies for improvement. If they did well, congratulate them. Document any further interaction or changes with a comment as well.

- In general, unless otherwise stated, the formatting of output is left up to the student. As long as output formatting is reasonable and conveys *just as much* information as the expected output, it should be graded as correct.

# Vigilance

- Be on the lookout for improvements to policies, processes, grading, course material, etc. I welcome any and all feedback and would appreciate it.

- Be on the lookout for suspected academic integrity violations, odd code idiosyncrasies or patterns not covered in class, similarities in code, disparate performance in class/lab/hack and grades received, etc. However, never confront a student directly. Bring your concerns to the instructor and be sure to document everything.

- Be on the lookout for racial, gender, or other biases or incidents. It is essential that we promote an open and equitable environment for everyone. If you see a potential issue or event, please intervene and correct it immediately. Report incidences to the instructor as soon as possible.

# Online Office Hours

- Your instructor will provide you with a "standing meeting" zoom ([https://unl.zoom.us/](https://unl.zoom.us/)) link or meeting ID to use

- You will need a reliable internet connection, microphone and (optionally) a webcam.

- You should wear headphones to reduce feedback and hold your office hours in a relatively quiet/noise free area

- When you join a meeting:
  - In the "more" drop down, set it so that zoom plays a chime on enter/exit so

that if you are running zoom in the background you are made aware when a student joins

 – Maximize the chat and "manage participants" windows so you can see everyone and are aware of the chat contents

- In general, mute and stop your video unless you need to speak

- It is suggested you get a physical webcam cover and use it to protect your privacy

- Upload an appropriate photo of yourself to your profile so students can identify you when you are not streaming video

- Rename your profile name to what you use with students and include a tag indicating your are and LA for which course (the zoom may be shared with multiple courses. For example, `(LA - 155E)` or `(LA - 194)` .

- When a student enters, be sure to address them and ask how you can help right away. Notify them politely if they are muted

- Your instructor *may* provide you with a *host key* that allows you to claim host duties if there is no host already.

- As host, you will be tasked with the following additional responsibilities:

 – Create breakout rooms and assign students/LAs to them

 – Note: You *may* need to establish a number of breakout rooms (create 20 and select manual assignments) if no rooms have been created as, once breakout rooms have been established, no additional rooms can be created until all have been removed

 – Try to stay in the main room or hand off hosting duties to another LA before you go to a breakout room otherwise keep the breakout room window open so you know when others enter the main room as new students joining a lobby will only see those currently in the lobby and may assume no LAs are available

 – Hand off host duties to another LA (if applicable) before you leave. Leaving without first reassigning host may result in a student being assigned host responsibilities

 – Be sure to rotate LAs that you ask to help with students