

Optimizing Development and Communication

CSCI 335 – Spring 2021

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When To Ask For Help

Before you read this document, ensure you have a thorough understanding of the syllabus.

Implementation

It is the writer’s responsibility to debug code. Compile early and compile often. Use local, private version control (e.g. git), and optionally save your own code to an external drive for backup or use a continuous backup service (e.g. TimeMachine on macOS). If you reach a point where you cannot fix your code, revert to a previous working state.

With these conditions met, you can ask for help once you point to a part of the textbook most similar to your question and then proceed with the steps in How to ask for help.

When not to ask for help

“Is my implementation correct?” is not a supported question. Instead, write your own tests based on the contents of the assignment specification. **The writer is**

responsible for ensuring that programs do not crash. Never neglect an edge-case that could cause your program to crash.

“Why doesn’t X work on my platform?” is not a supported question. The student is responsible for using use a supported platform with supported applications (the Syllabus explains this). Gradescope is for submitting, not debugging or testing your program.

“Before, I learned X , but now it says do Y .” Some functionality may have more than one working implementation. For our purposes, the space of *correct* implementations is smaller. Simply adhere to the specifications of Y .

Concept

In general, you can ask for help once you’ve looked at the textbook and provide a recounting of what you read and your understanding of it and your confusion.

Where to ask for help

These are the only acceptable forms of contact for UTAs:

1. Office Hours

Office hours is a place where you can get individualized attention and directly ask questions. Using office hours maximizes throughput and minimizes latency. If you are confused about a conceptual topic or interpreting an error message, please use office hours and avoid long email exchanges.

2. Blackboard

The discussion board on Blackboard is a platform for *aggregation*. That means if you have a short, clear logistical, clarification, or conceptual question that you believe many in class might have, choose Blackboard. **Blackboard is only effective if you exhaustively search for your issue and do not post duplicates** Note: Blackboard is no substitute for the assignment description or the syllabus. To reiterate, no assignment code is to be shared on Blackboard.

3. Email

Email is to be used if you have an issue that requires exchange of private information or source code. For any other issue, it should only be used as a last resort. **Read the email etiquette document under Course Information on Blackboard.**

How to ask for Help

Please form a question. Even if you do not know exactly how to ask your question, come up with one or more precise situations where you don’t understand the

provided explanation. These situations may come from the textbook or slides.

Question Body

Regardless of the platform you use, be **descriptive** with how you title your question. In any communication, replace everything within angle brackets < example > with the appropriate phrase or description, if it applies. Leave no angle brackets in your response.

Title/Subject Line: [CSCI 335] < Descriptive Message >

Part of the assignment:

File / Page in question:

Function, method, or class:

I understand that < part1 you understand >, but I am unclear on how to go from < part1 > to < part2 > because I expected that < one solution would lead to this desired behavior > but < this happens instead >.

I try to compile it on my machine and < result of compilation >. Then I run it with the following command: < text of command >.

I am trying to accomplish < behavior >, but instead, < undesired behavior > occurs. I have tried < high-level descriptions of processes attempted >, but < undesired behavior happens instead >.

Title Example: Instead of “Homework Question” or “Homework Inquiry”, one must write “[CSCI 335] Question 3.8: Clarification Vector Erase Parameters”

Final Remarks

Before You Hit Send/Submit

1. Re-read your message.
2. Address each person with the correct name and title.