CS 2102 FAQ Page

This page addresses some of the most frequently asked questions about this course. This page may be revised as new questions come to light or existing answers require further clarification. Any significant changes will be announced on the InstructAssist forums.

You are responsible for knowing the information on this page. The instructor, TAs, and SAs reserve the right to refer you to this page if you have a question that's listed here. Please consult this page and then follow up with a staff member if you need more information or clarification.

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Homework Assignments

Q: The homework assignment covers some concepts we haven't talked about in class yet.

Because of the tight timeframe of the 7-week terms, it sometimes happens that we are not able to cover all concepts in class before the related homework assignment is released. However, we will always have covered enough for you to get started, and we will always cover the rest in class with plenty of time left before the assignment due date. If you want to work ahead, though, please complete the required reading assignments, which are very tightly coupled to the lectures.

Q: How many times can I submit an assignment on InstructAssist before the deadline?

As many as you want! As long as it's before the deadline, we will only grade the submission with the most recent timestamp.

Q: Where can I find feedback on my homework assignments?

A grade sheet will be filled out for every graded homework assignment. The grader will upload a copy of the grade sheet to the InstructAssist accounts of both homework partners. You can access the grade sheet for a particular assignment by choosing the "Grades" tab in InstructAssist, and "Display Grades". There's an "Attachment" for each Homework assignment listed in the Grade Report. Click on the attachment to see your feedback.

Q: My classmates have received their homework feedback on InstructAssist, but my feedback isn't posted. Why?

There is a sizable staff grading CS 2102 homework assignments. The graders will be uploading your feedback as soon as they can, but expect that the feedback will be available at different times from different graders. We'll try to guarantee that the feedback for any given assignment will be posted within a week of the due date.

Q: What should I do if I think my homework assignment has been graded incorrectly?

If you have any questions or concerns about your grade, your first line of defense is the TA or SA who graded your assignment (this information will be at the top of the grading rubric you get back). *Please do not come to the instructor first*. You can visit the TA or SA during his or her office hours or make a private post on the InstructAssist forum. Be sure the post is directed specifically at the TA or SA in question. If you are not satisfied with the results, you may then come and talk to the instructor.

Q: What does a "1" mean in the InstructAssist gradebook?

A "1" is simply a placeholder that we use to link to your auto-grader results. **A "1" does not necessarily mean you have passed the auto-grader tests. You must actually open up your auto-grader results to see if you have passed.** We cannot stress enough the importance of this! Students who mistake the "1" for a passing grade will not be permitted to make up the assignment!

Q: What is the difference between a late submission and a resubmission?

A *late submission* means you are submitting your assignment *for the first time* within 24 hours after the deadline. A *resubmission* means you are submitting your assignment *for the second time and only once auto-grader results have been published.*

It's important to understand how the assignment flow works in this class. The following is a typical example, although times may vary depending on the week:

Tuesday, 5:00 pm	Initial assignment deadline.
Wednesday, 5:00 pm	*Late submission* deadline. This submission will be penalized if it is not the first assignment that the student has submitted late this term.
Wednesday, 10:00 pm	One of the SAs runs the auto-grader on all assignments, both on-time and late. The auto-grader results are published to InstructAssist, and the SA will announce their publication on the IA forum.
Thursday, 10:00 pm	*Resubmission* deadline. Any student can resubmit his or her assignment, but all resubmissions come with a penalty. Therefore, it's up to each student to decide whether it's worthwhile from a grade standpoint to resubmit the assignment. Usually, it's only worthwhile if you broke the auto-grader or failed the vast majority of your auto-grader tests.
	Students *may not* submit their assignment for the first time when resubmitting. Any attempt to do so will be ignored by the graders. All

	submissions must be initially received by the late submission deadline to receive any credit.
Friday night	The SA runs the auto-grader again, this time only on all of the resubmissions. The auto-grader results are published to InstructAssist, and the SA will announce their publication on the IA forum.
Sunday night	The staff posts final grades to InstructAssist for the assignment.

Q: What does it mean to "break the auto-grader"?

The auto-grader is a script that runs a series of JUnit tests against your code. These tests assume that your classes and methods have very specific names and signatures. If there is any mismatch, the auto-grader will crash, and you will receive no credit for the auto-graded portion of the assignment. Your auto-grader feedback will reveal whether or not you broke it. Instead of a series of scores and pass/fail indicators, you will see one or more messages that look something like this:

```
hw1/astudent/src/CompileCheck.java:13: error: cannot find symbol
ShootingRound shootingRound1 = new ShootingRound(1);
^
symbol: class ShootingRound
location: class CompileCheck
```

Q: Why is the auto-grader so exact about names and signatures?

An exact match-up is required for the auto-grader to work correctly, but this is an important habit to get used to in general. Most programs in the real world tie into third-party libraries or frameworks that have classes and methods with exact names and signatures. Using these tools requires that the programmer match up the class or method name and signature precisely, often even down to the correct capitalization!

For many homework assignments, we provide you with a CompileCheck file. This file contains calls to all of the class and method signatures that the auto-grader expects you to have. If you pass the CompileCheck file, it's unlikely that you'll break the auto-grader. (Some of the auto-grader tests may still fail due to runtime or logical errors, but at least it won't break.)

Students sometimes find programming challenging because it requires such a high level of attention to detail. Even one comma or semicolon out of place can cause your program to crash. This makes programming a very time-consuming activity, which is why it's important to follow the programming practices introduced in the videos assigned to you during Week 1. The more you program, the more comfortable you'll become with the demands that writing an effective program requires.

Homework Partners

Q: If I have a partner, do we each need to submit the assignment on InstructAssist?

No. If you're paired up in InstructAssist, a submission from one of you will show up for both of you.

Q: I have a bad partner. What do I do?

If you feel like your partner is uncooperative or not pulling his or her own weight on the homework assignments, you are welcome to switch partners or drop your partner altogether.

It is very important to identify and address problems with your partner quickly. The longer you are working with an uncooperative partner, the harder it will be to find you a new one, and the greater the probability that your grade will be negatively affected by an ineffective partnership.

Q: How do I change or drop a partner?

Contact the instructor, as this is something that only people with admin access to the InstructAssist course can do. If there is somebody in the class you want to work with who is not already paired up, please include his or her name so that the instructor can make the pair in IA. Otherwise, the instructor will simply drop your partner status, and you can then choose to put yourself back in the system for a random partner assignment if you choose.

Q: InstructAssist is not pairing me up with anybody. What's my next option?

Try posting on the IA forums requesting a partner. If somebody responds, you can pair yourselves up in IA.

Q: Are we allowed to work with more than one partner?

No. We're aware that this is permissible in some other courses, but in CS 2102, you are only allowed to work individually or in teams of two. You are welcome to meet up with other individuals or teams to form study groups, but each individual or team must turn in their own work. Please see the Academic Honesty policy in the syllabus for more information.

Labs

Q: I need to miss or have missed a lab. Is there a way to make it up?

If you know ahead of time that you need to miss a lab, you are welcome to attend a different lab. A list of all lab times and locations is available in the syllabus. Upon arrival, please inform the TAs or SAs running the lab why you are attending that lab section instead of your usual one, and then add your name to the sign-in sheet. Also, please be aware that seating for each lab is limited, and students already registered for that lab section get first priority in seating.

If you missed a lab, you will take a 0 for that lab. You are not allowed to complete a lab independently outside of a lab section, although it's important to be familiar with each lab even if you didn't complete it. In addition, we drop the lowest lab at the end of the term, much like we do quizzes, so missing one lab won't hurt you.

Quizzes and Exams

Q: When will I get my graded quizzes back?

Graded quizzes will be returned on Tuesdays/Wednesdays during lab sections unless otherwise announced in class.

Q: I missed or will need to miss a quiz. What do I do?

This is why we drop the lowest quiz grade. Unfortunately, the logistics of this course make giving make-up quizzes extremely difficult, so we just give you a 0 for the quiz and drop it at the end of the term. This is true regardless of the reason for missing the quiz. We recommend reviewing the quiz solutions anyway once they're posted, as they make great study tools for the midterm and final.

Q: I missed or will need to miss the midterm or final. What do I do?

Just like quizzes, we don't offer make-ups of the midterm or final for any reason. In this case, however, you are allowed to take an incomplete in the course and then retake the midterm or final the next time this course is offered. At that point, we will update your grade from an incomplete to your letter grade after factoring in your exam score. Please come talk to the instructor to make this arrangement.

NOTE: CS 2102 is always offered both B and D terms of every academic year.

Q: What should I do if I feel that one of my quizzes or exams was graded incorrectly?

All quiz questions should be taken to a TA or the instructor. These are the only people with the authority to change quiz grades. SAs do not grade the quizzes, so they are unable to make any alterations. However, the SAs can explain why you got a problem wrong or help you understand the concepts in more detail.

All exam questions should come only to the instructor. The instructor is the only person with the authority to change grades on the midterm or final.

In either case, please come see the TA or instructor during office hours. Quiz and exam grading errors cannot be addressed online.

Final Grades

Q: What's my current grade in the class?

InstructAssist does not (yet) have a mechanism to show you your running class average like Canvas does. The staff does not have this information either, as we don't compute your class average until the very end of the term. Therefore, we recommend keeping track of your own average using your scores so far and the distribution of grades described in the syllabus.

Q: Do you curve the grades?

Generally not by more than a point or two. It depends on how the distribution of scores look at the end of the term. Please don't plan to rely on a curve to salvage your grade.

Q: Do you offer any extra credit in this course?

No. Students often ask this late in the term when they're looking for a grade boost. If there's not a reasonable chance of salvaging your grade, your best bet is probably to take an NR in the course and retake it the next time it's offered. If you're not sure what to do, please feel free to contact the instructor for an individual consultation.

Q: I'm thinking about taking an NR in this course and then retaking it the next time it's offered, but I'm concerned about how this will impact my ability to graduate on time.

This is a question you should take up with your academic advisor. He or she can help you determine what impact retaking this course will have on the rest of your academic career.

Other Course Logistics

Q: How do I overload into the course?

Bring your overload form to the instructor so that it can be signed.

Q: I don't have access to InstructAssist. What do I need to do?

Send an email to the instructor so that you can be added manually to the InstructAssist course. Please make sure you use your WPI email.

Q: Where are TA/SA office hours held?

The TA office hour room is FL A22, in the sub-basement of Fuller Labs. The sub-basement is the bottom-most level of Fuller. Follow the signs to the "Zoo Lab", which is next door to the office hour room.

Q: Do you post the lecture slides and code from class?

Yes. All slides, code, and other materials used during class will be made available on Canvas after the lecture is over. Look under the appropriate week on the Modules page for these materials.

Q: Do you record and post your lectures online?

No, as this tends to discourage student participation in lectures. Furthermore, it's not uncommon in lecture to switch between multiple devices such as the podium PC, a laptop, and the opaque projector. This makes lecture capture difficult.

However, we will sometimes post pre-recorded videos that go over some of the concepts, such as the videos in your required reading in Week 1. The instructor also typically does audio recordings of the midterm and final review sessions.

In addition, there are a lot of videos online that can serve as additional tutorials for class concepts. We encourage you to spend some time browsing around to find something that interests you. If you find

something you think would benefit the class, please let the instructor know so that it can be added to the list of class resources.

Q: I missed or will need to miss one or more lectures. What do I need to do?

Ideally, you should find someone in the class who takes good notes and is willing to share them with you for the days you miss. In addition, make sure you complete all of the required reading, keep up with the assignment deadlines, and review all of the class materials posted on Canvas. Finally, remember you can reach out to the staff for help during office hours if you need to go over the material you missed.

Q: I enrolled in the class late. What do I need to do?

This is the same situation as missing a lecture, so please follow the advice in the previous question.

Q: I have a Letter of Accommodation. What steps do I need to take?

The staff is always ready and willing to help you with any accommodations you may need. If you require an electronic device during lecture, you are welcome to use it. If you need access to any lecture materials, they will all be posted online after the lecture.

If you require extra time on quizzes and exams, you will need to schedule appointments with the EPC on test days. *Please plan to take your quiz or exam at the EPC the morning of the day that it will be administered in class, and on quiz days, please make sure your quiz is finished early enough that you can be back in class for the remainder of lecture.* For security reasons, we generally don't like to administer EPC quizzes or exams outside of this morning block.

Please reach out to the instructor if you require further accommodations or have any additional questions.

Q: Do you offer CS 2102 over the summer?

No. There's usually not enough interest or logistical support to justify it. If you would really like to see this course offered over the summer, though, please contact the front office of the CS department. Enough student demand may make a summer section of this course a reality.

Doing Well

Q: I have not taken CS 1101. Am I in going to be in trouble in this course?

That largely depends on your prior programming experience.

If you have not taken CS 1101 because you took AP Computer Science in high school or an equivalent course at another institution, you'll probably be fine. CS 1101 covers the same topics as most introductory CS courses. The instructor will occasionally show Racket code in class, but this is to help students in their transition from CS 1101 to CS 2102. You don't have to know Racket to follow the lectures.

If you took CS 1004, your learning curve will be a bit steeper. CS 1004 is intended for non-CS majors and prepares you for CS 2119, not CS 2102. There will likely be some gaps in your knowledge that you will have to fill in as we go along. You may be more comfortable switching to CS 2119.

If you have not taken any programming courses before CS 2102 and have little programming experience, your learning curve may be very steep. This course assumes that you have a CS 1101-equivalent level of programming experience.

Some students who fall into the latter two categories still do well, but some struggle. This is also sometimes true for students who took CS 1101 2 - 3 years ago and have done little programming since. Please feel free to reach out to the instructor if you'd like to get advice about the best course of action for you.

For reference, the CS 1101 curriculum **can be found here (https://web.cs.wpi.edu/~cs1101/c19/)** .

Q: Is it true that students who come in already knowing Java have an advantage in this course?

Yes it is, but that's by accident, not design.

The focus of this class is on object-oriented programming (OOP), not on Java skills. Java is simply the language of choice that we use to teach these concepts because of its OOP strengths, just as Racket is the language of choice in CS 1101 because of its strengths in teaching introductory programming concepts. Any students familiar with Racket going into CS 1101 have an advantage there as well, just as students familiar with C, C++, or Assembly might have an advantage in CS 2303 and CS 2011. The difference in CS 1101 is that students have rarely--if ever--heard of Racket, so it levels the playing field a bit even if students have had prior programming experience in other languages.

CS 2102 is not an Introduction to Java course. In fact, most CS courses at most universities are not introductory language courses. They focus on CS concepts, and the languages used are tools to explore those concepts. The expectation is that students will pick up new languages quickly and on their own time, which is an invaluable skill to have in the workforce.

To that end, we will not spend a lot of lecture time diving into Java syntax. We will discuss it as needed for the purposes of in-class demos of OOP concepts, but you will be responsible for taking time outside of class to fill in the gaps in your knowledge. The staff is happy to help answer your questions during office hours and on the InstructAssist forum, and the **Additional Java Resources (https://canvas.wpi.edu/courses/16466/pages/additional-java-resources)** page lists a few great references that help you explore the language in more detail.

Q: I'm feeling lost and confused, and/or I'm having trouble keeping up with the pace of this course. What should I do?

Here are a few suggestions:

- Complete all of the required reading BEFORE the concepts covered in the reading are discussed in class. You'll find the lectures easier to follow if you've already had some exposure to the material.

- Start all homework assignments early! You will always have at least one week to complete each assignment, and the earlier you start, the more time you'll have to ask questions and overcome obstacles.
- Attend office hours as often as needed. Almost all staff members hold them and they rarely overlap, so there are plenty of opportunities to get help. Remember that office hours are not just for homework questions: you can also use them if you want to review one or more of the concepts from class.
- Make use of the MASH and individual tutoring options described in the syllabus.
- Ask questions on the forum as often as needed. A staff member will usually reply to your question within a day or so of your posting, although other students are welcome to answer questions as well.
- Form study groups with your classmates, even if you don't know anybody else in the class. This can be as simple as asking the people sitting around you in class, lab, or office hours, but you can also post requests on the forum.
- Take a look at the resources posted on the **Additional Java Resources (https://canvas.wpi.edu/courses/16466/pages/additional-java-resources)** page. Also take a look around online for additional resources that may help you.
- The instructor usually holds review sessions before the midterm and final exams. Make sure you attend if your schedule allows!

If you've done all of these things and are still feeling lost, please feel free to reach out to the instructor.

Q: I feel like I struggle with test anxiety on the quizzes and exams. What should I do?

The best way to overcome test anxiety is to prepare thoroughly for each quiz and exam. All quizzes and exams allow you to have a sheet of handwritten notes, front and back, and taking the time to build a thorough one is a great study tactic. Make sure you do more than just copy the slides and notes from class, though; take the time to ensure you thoroughly understand the concepts.

If you feel that your test anxiety issues run more deeply than that, please make an appointment with the **Student Development and Counseling Center (https://www.wpi.edu/offices/student-development-counseling-center)** . Their services are free to all students, and they work with a lot of students dealing with test anxiety.

In addition to in-person consultations, the SDCC also offers an online resource called **TAO Connect (https://thepath.taoconnect.org/local/login/index.php)** . According to the SDCC, "It includes many different modules that can help not only with anxiety ([including] test anxiety), but also stress, relationships problems, communication struggles, or even evaluating your alcohol and drug use. It is self-guided and all students need is their WPI email addresses to login." To register, go to the **TAO Connect home page (https://thepath.taoconnect.org/local/login/index.php)** and click "Sign Up in Self-Help with an Institution."

Q: Do you have additional practice problems?

There are a number of practice problems scattered throughout Prof. Fisler's online text. We list them under the "Additional Practice" heading in the module for each week. These problems are strictly for your own benefit and are not submitted or graded, but you are welcome to ask about them during office hours or on the discussion forum.