

Guide to TA Hours

Spring 2019

Contents

1	SignMeUp	1
2	Hours Etiquette	1
3	Lines Policy	2

Objectives

These guidelines are designed with the intent of giving all students equal access to TA hours. Please read them carefully to ensure that you fully understand them, and in particular, to ensure that you fully understand the collaboration policy as it relates to TA hours.

1 SignMeUp

We will be using software called SignMeUp to handle lines during hours. You can access the site from any computer or mobile device. Simply login using your banner username and password, and enter your hours question. We encourage you to write a detailed question when signing up, as it helps us as TAs tell when we can hold large group sessions. While detailed questions are not required, **you must at least put the name of the assignment you require help on.**

You may check the queue (and sign up!) by going to:

<https://signmeup.cs.brown.edu/>

If for any reason SignMeUp is not working, you should (of course!) still come to hours. We will use old-fashioned technology to store the queue (a whiteboard, in which you write your name at the bottom of a list of names upon arrival).

2 Hours Etiquette

We ask that you abide by proper “etiquette” as it pertains to hours, which we articulate below:

- We hold hours nearly every day of the week. While we understand that occasionally you may have a last minute question on an assignment that is due in short order, making your question seem urgent, please try to come to hours well in advance of an assignment’s due date. *We will not prioritize students’ questions based on their assignments’ due dates.*
- We expect you to attempt to solve your problem on your own before coming to hours. As proof that you have done so, you should not come to hours without having at least attempted to

work out a thorough set of test cases. Test cases provide evidence of your efforts to understand and solve the problem on your own.

Of course, if you do not understand the problem well enough to even begin to write down test cases, you may still come to hours for help. However, usually the sorts of clarification questions that would help you understand the problem can be asked and answered on Piazza or email, and do not necessitate coming to hours.

So, in almost all cases, *we expect students to arrive at hours having already worked through several germane test cases.*

- If you get an error when you run your code, read the error message and try to debug your program on your own before coming to hours. The TAs are not obliged to help you with debugging, and usually will not have much time, so they will frown upon you if you haven't made any attempt to understand the error yourself.
 - In order to speed up debugging, come in to hours ready with a few comments detailing what you have tried.
- TA hours tend to be long; if you have a conceptual or clarification question, you should check Piazza or other course documentation to see if your question is already answered elsewhere before coming to hours.
- When you come to hours, don't shove your computer in your TA's face. Because we want you to understand and be able to explain your code and walk through the problem solving process, TAs will not look at your code unless necessary, and then only if you are in the debugging line.
- If you are not present at hours when your name is called, you have 15 minutes to show up. After the 15 minutes, your name will be erased and you will have to sign up for hours again. **This will be strictly enforced.**
- If you are marked missing, it is your responsibility to inform the TAs on duty when you are there. If both TAs are working with students, you can approach one and let them know that you've arrived.
- Please do not approach the TA staff outside hours (in the Sunlab, the CIT, the dorms, the dining halls, etc.) with questions about **CS18**. TAs are students too, and they have their own work to complete.
- When working with a partner on a project, you must both be signed up on the queue together, even if only one partner is present at TA hours. This does not mean writing your partner's name in the question, but adding your partner's email address alongside yours when joining the queue. This means that while you are both in line, you may not sign up for help with other assignments as well.

3 Lines Policy

During hours, the TAs will maintain three lists on SignMeUp and answer questions from the lists either in parallel or in an interleaving fashion.

Express Line The express line is for people who need checkoffs for completed labs. You must have completed the lab in its entirety to sign up for a lab check-off; TAs will not answer questions about the lab in this line.

Debugging Line The second line is for all debugging questions. If the line is not empty, you will be limited to 15 minutes with a TA when you are called. If this is not enough time to find your bug, the TA may tell you to post your code on Piazza.

Conceptual Line The third and final line is for all conceptual questions about course content. If the line is not empty, you will be limited to 10 minutes with a TA when you are called. The TAs will not look at your code if you are called in the conceptual line; you can ask code questions, but not about your code specifically. For example, “How would you set up a loop to fill an array with values” would be a valid conceptual question.

We encourage you to use the waiting time during TA hours to collaborate with other students in the class (in accordance with the collaboration policy, of course!). Perhaps another student in the class can answer your question before the TAs can. As a reminder, you may not code together, look at each others’ code, or take away notes from your discussions. Refer to the collaboration policy (posted on the course homepage) for details.

Please let us know if you find any mistakes, inconsistencies, or confusing language in this or any other CS18 document by filling out the anonymous feedback form: <http://cs.brown.edu/courses/cs018/feedback>.