

Asking Helpful Questions

If you're stuck on a homework assignment or concerned about your course performance, please ask! However, asking good questions is also a skill.

There are helpful and unhelpful ways to ask for assistance. Below are common examples of student questions or statements that are difficult for the teaching team to address.

1. "Pre-grading" requests

Examples:

- *"Could you look over my assignment and let me know if I did anything wrong?"*
- *"Is my answer correct?"*
- *"Did I write enough for this answer?"*

The teaching team will not directly answer these requests. You will be redirected to ask something more specific.

What to do instead:

- If you completed the assignment without any trouble, then be confident in your work and simply submit the assignment! 😊
- If you're unsure about something specific, then ask about that specific thing!
 - Helpful example: *"Do we need to include the plot for Question 2?"*
 - Helpful example: *"Do we need to define the p-value when using it as evidence for answering the research question?"*
- If you're having trouble knowing what to include in your answer, then ask about what the question is looking for
 - Helpful example: *"Question 4 asks us to refer to our Sampler in our answer. How much detail is needed when referring to the Sampler?"*
 - Helpful example: *"I know Question 8 is asking about [...], but I'm not sure what this question is looking for. Is there another way to restate this question?"*

2. Completely open-ended requests

Examples:

- *"I looked at the homework, but I don't know what to do. Can you give me a hint?"*
- *"I did Step 1, what do I do next?"*

What to do instead:

- Identify something specific to ask about. What specifically are you unsure about? Putting in additional thought to ask a more specific question may both (1) help you better understand the assignment, and (2) actually answer your own question!

- Since the homework closely follows the in-class activities, the most helpful thing to do is to ask which part of an activity you should review. This is partly why understanding the in-class activities is crucial.
 - Helpful example: *"I'm concerned my TinkerPlots sampler isn't set up correctly. Which activity provides a similar example that I can use as a comparison?"*

3. Other statements that are difficult to work with

Examples:

- *"I really need an A in this class."*
- *"I'm so close to a higher grade. Can you look over my past assignments and find a way to give me some points back?"*

We understand that your grade is important to you. However, even if not intended, the implication of these statements is for the teaching team to do something unethical, such as grade things differently for different students.

What to do instead:

- Ask about ways to improve your performance in the course
 - Helpful example: *"I really want to do well in this class. What else can I do to ensure I succeed?"*
 - Helpful example: *"I'd like to earn a better grade on future assignments and quizzes. What advice do you have?"*
- Ask about predicting what your potential grade may be, based on a number of scenarios – we're happy to forecast your grade for you!
 - Helpful example: *"Score-wise, what do I need on the remaining coursework to earn an A in the course?"*
- If you think your grade or scores are incorrect, then please ask; we'll double-check!

4. Final suggestions for effective professional habits

- Please ask for assistance *before* a deadline! Asking lots of homework questions 10 minutes before a deadline or after a deadline reinforces unhelpful work habits and may put you and the teaching team in a difficult situation.
- For any appointments outside of office hours, please show up! If you can't make the agreed upon meeting, please send a message of cancellation to the instructor or TA you had planned to meet with. Not showing up to a scheduled appointment without communicating is a bad habit to form and is unprofessional in any setting. A little bit of professionalism goes a long way!