

## THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WEBASSIGN

### ***WebAssign can be a good learning tool.***

Where else can you enter a wrong answer, correct your mistake and then still get full credit? How many times have you lost points on a written assignment or exam because you forgot a minus sign or left out a term in your steps? This is your opportunity to catch those mistakes without being penalized. It is also a good opportunity to practice the precise writing of expressions. We are very picky about writing things properly in math, not unlike your composition/English instructor. And one of the best advantages is that you will know immediately if you are correct or not. There is nothing worse than doing problems incorrectly and not finding out until the graded papers are returned the following week. Because information in one section is often needed for the following section, due dates can be quicker (and more flexible) to help you practice the material on a timely basis. And nothing is perfect. That is why we also collect written work and give quizzes.

### ***Pay attention to the variable.***

Problems seem so much easier when you use  $x$ , do not they? Do you have a habit of purposely changing the letter to  $x$  before working through a problem? You will definitely encounter many different letters here, including some Greek letters. Do not be surprised when we deduct points on a hand-written homework if you use the wrong letter. Using parameters for the randomized values really helps when discussing homework problems with your instructor and other students.

### ***After two attempts, stop and redo the problem or look in your notes.***

Common sense seems to go out the window after two attempts. Your attempts should not look radically different unless you were way off in the first place. Trial and error should not be a strategy. With only 5 attempts on the free response answers, you cannot afford to randomly try different answers. In many cases your first attempt is the closest. And do not guess at an answer before attempting the problem. Besides gaining little if you are correct, you have also wasted an attempt.

### ***Pay attention to the instructions.***

If you click on the answer field and the CalcPad pops up, you should enter an exact simplified answer. If your answer is  $\sqrt{5}$ , for example, then enter  $\sqrt{5}$ . Do not use your calculator to get a decimal approximation. Instead of the CalcPad popping up, you might see instructions such as Enter an Exact Fraction. If your answer is  $\frac{4}{13}$ , for example, then enter  $\frac{4}{13}$ . Again, do not use your calculator to get a decimal approximation. In almost all cases when a decimal approximation is required, you will be told how many decimal places to enter.

### ***Do not enter an equivalent expression when your attempt is marked wrong.***

If you just entered  $x * (x + 2)$  and it was marked wrong, your second attempt should not be  $(x + 2) * x$ . It is not true that the program will only accept the answer in a specific way. The software behind the scenes matches expressions that are mathematically equivalent. Do not send your instructor an email starting with “WebAssign says my correct answer is wrong, what does it want?” It is extremely rare that a correct answer will be marked wrong. Your instructor can view all of your responses to a question.

### ***Leaving out parentheses is not the careless mistake you think it is.***

$x * (x + 2)$  is not the same as  $x * x + 2$ . In a free response answer you will see your expression before having to submit it. Make sure it is exactly what you intended to write. The CalcPad that is used in WebAssign allows you to enter expressions manually or with a drop-down menu for preset mathematical symbols.

### ***Simplify your answers.***

You just computed a derivative and your result is messy. You now have a decision to make. One choice is to enter that mess and take your chances. Unfortunately, if instructions say “simplify your final answer” on a written assignment or an exam, you will lose points for not simplifying. WebAssign is allowing you to practice

this skill too. Your second choice is to simplify your answer and then enter that. If your answer is marked wrong, you will need to determine if your original derivative calculation is wrong or if your simplification is wrong. Checking both is the best practice you can get.

***The method of trial and error is not an efficient way to answer a problem.***

This is especially true if the number of attempts allowed is small. That particular strategy is also useless on an exam, so why rely on it here?

***We cannot help you if you do not record your work clearly on paper.***

If you cannot remember what you did to get your answer two days ago, we certainly cannot. Well, we probably can, but we will not let you off the hook that easy. Using an online grading system is not an excuse to be sloppy. And this is important not just for the moment when you are doing your assignment, but also when you are studying for a quiz or exam later. The Notes link in each question can only be viewed by you. Your instructor cannot see what you have written there.

***Not reading the problem carefully has consequences.***

You have just used up an attempt because you did not see the word NOT in the instructions. The advantage here is that you find that out immediately instead of two or three days later when you get your graded paper back. Take advantage of this. Reread the problem first.

***Did you struggle with a handwritten assignment but “easily” completed the corresponding WebAssign assignment?***

This sounds similar to the “I did all the homework problems just fine, but I cannot do your tests” comment that we sometimes hear. Can you summarize what you did in this section/assignment? Have you redone the assignment problems so often that they are practically memorized? Was your goal to just get as many points as you could on the assignment or did you reflect on the problems and learn from your mistakes? How many attempts did it take for you to get a correct answer? How often did you ask someone for help? What types of mistakes did you make? Did you know how to start each problem, or did you have to look in your notes first?