

# Math 131, Fall 2015: Policies & Procedures

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## 4.0 scale

All coursework, exams, etc. are graded on the 4.0 scale. The mapping between numerical and letter grades, together with definitions of letter grades, can be found in Table 1 on page 3. That table also displays the official definitions from “Policies and Procedures” section of the Undergraduate Catalog, together with an interpretation for the purposes of a mathematics course (in italics).

## Coursework

In general, it is important to remember that there are two purposes for coursework: to solidify your knowledge by working through examples, and to communicate to me (or the homework grader) that you have done so. Homework is primarily for your benefit!

- Students are encouraged to collaborate on assignments, but must submit their own work for evaluation.
- In general, credit is not given for late or incomplete work. I may, at my discretion, accept late work and file it away; such work will only be considered if your course grade is at the boundary between two different grades.
- I consider the presentation of your work to be one indication of the level of understanding: Write neatly, use complete sentences where appropriate, etc.

## Weekly homework

Each week I will assign two problem sets. My plan is for the problems to be due on Tuesdays and Fridays in the SQRC. This schedule will be adjusted as necessary.

When submitting work, please make sure that

- your name and the the week number (or assignment title) are clearly written at the top of the first page,
- all pages are stapled together.

Papers which do not meet these standards are at risk of being placed in to one my “miscellaneous” folders, from which few documents ever return.

## Quizzes & Exams

Periodically there will be short in-class quizzes. The purpose of these quizzes is to give you a chance to test your understanding in an exam-like format.

There will be two in-class hour-long exams during the semester. Exam dates will be announced one week in advance. There will also be a comprehensive final exam, which will be given during the regularly scheduled final exam time.

Each exam problem is individually graded on the 4.0 scale. If you want to get a rough indication of your “total” exam score you can simply compute the mean. Note however, that I enter each score independently in my records, and may weight certain problems more than others, depending on systematic factors, etc. For example: If the entire class does really poorly on a particular problem due to a systematic mis-understanding of that problem, then this problem will be weighted less than the others. Likewise, longer problems may be weighted more heavily than shorter problems.

## Course grades

Course grades are to be a reflection of students’ success in engaging with the course material, analyzing that material, and synthesizing the content in to a coherent framework which can be applied to subjects beyond the course.

Course grades are computed as follows:

1. A preliminary grade is computed by calculating a weighted average of all scores, according to the following weighting:
  - 30% Exams
  - 30% Final Exam
  - 40% Homework & Quizzes
2. After computing the preliminary grade, I make adjustments based on inconsistent coursework (such as disregarding an outlier), trends throughout the semester (such as improvement), and other relevant factors.
3. Finally, I revisit the individual grades in view of the grade definitions provided by the College Catalog, seeking indicators of the synthesis of course material.

I emphasize that ultimately grades are assigned according to the definitions in the college catalog, based on my assessment of the student’s knowledge and synthesis of the course material. Thus while a weighted average of individual scores is a critical tool for making this assessment, in no way is such an average definitive.

Finally, I note that students will fail the course if either of the following occurs:

**Insufficient participation** Missing the equivalent of two weeks of class sessions, or missing one of the in-class exams, will lead to a failing grade. Exceptions to this policy require documented extenuating circumstances.

**Gross negligence** Demonstration of gross ignorance or complete lack of understanding of key concepts on exams will lead to a failing grade. In particular, a student who has accumulated what might be construed as ‘technically enough points to pass’ but demonstrates a “clearly inadequate” lack of understanding which is “unworthy of credit” will be awarded a failing grade.

Table 1: Official definition of grades, as they appear in the College Catalog, together with interpretation for the purpose of this course (in italics).

<p><b>Grade A (4.0)</b> Outstanding work that goes beyond analysis of course material to synthesize concepts in a valid and/or novel or creative way.</p> <p><i>Computational problems are completely and correctly executed in a manner which displays a complete grasp of the theory behind the computation. Theoretical responses display a thorough understanding of the both precise details and the larger framework at hand.</i></p>
<p><b>Grade B (3.0)</b> Very good to excellent work that analyzes material explored in class and is a reasonable attempt to synthesize material.</p> <p><i>Computational problems are executed with minimal, insignificant errors (such as dropping a sign) and contain some indication that the relevant theory being used is understood. Theoretical responses display significant progress towards understanding of how the details fit in to a larger framework.</i></p>
<p><b>Grade C (2.0)</b> Adequate work that satisfies the assignment, a limited analysis of material explored in class.</p> <p><i>Solutions to computational problems display significant, though perhaps mechanical, understanding of basic procedures. Theoretical responses display an preliminary understanding of the topic at hand, but lack connections to the larger framework.</i></p>
<p><b>Grade D (1.0)</b> Passing work that is minimally adequate, raising serious concern about readiness to continue in the field.</p> <p><i>Both computational and theoretical responses display some non-trivial knowledge and skills, but raise concerns about whether basic ideas and methods are understood.</i></p>
<p><b>Grade F (0.0)</b> Failing work that is clearly inadequate, unworthy of credit.</p> <p><i>Fundamental misunderstandings, mis-use of methods or theory, seemingly random or un-related material, etc.</i></p>