
Tips for Not Having WebAssign Mark Your Problems Incorrectly

So, WebAssign! It's got some handy features, and automatic grading so that you get to learn *right away* if you made a mistake or not. But sometimes it's the worst. Here are some ways to keep it from being the worst:

- **Carefully read this handout before wasting any submissions.** If something is going wrong, and you only have (at most) four more attempts to figure out what it is, you *don't* want to waste those submissions on tweaks that don't matter.
- **Make sure you're using the right variable names.** If the problem gives you variables a and b , WebAssign isn't going to know what you mean when you write x_1 and y_1 . And if there are Greek letters involved, use the Greek letter tool to enter them. a and α might look pretty similar to you, but to WebAssign they are completely different letters. And be careful that you're not typing x for multiplication.
- **Capitalization counts.** Capital letters and lowercase letters are considered different in mathematics, because sometimes you need to use both of them in the same context for different purposes. So make sure you're typing the right one, especially when the capital and lowercase versions look similar in WebAssign (x versus X , c versus C , etc).
- **Use only the variable names you are given.** Let's suppose that a problem says, "Compute the distance between the island and the raft as a function of time, t ." That means you should go ahead and feel free to use t in your answer, but *don't* try writing $d = \dots!$ Why? Because the problem never *said* anything about d . It doesn't know what d means. In this case, you would just write " $\sqrt{9t^2 + 4}$ " or whatever. No equals sign necessary.
- **If it *asks* for an equation, write one.** Now, some problems will say something like, "Write an equation for the number of apples, A , in terms of the number of trees, T ." In that case, you should write something like $A = 40T - 7$, because it asks for an equation.
- **Round as little as you can.** In general, you should try to avoid writing numbers in decimal form until you get to the very end of the problem. *Also*, when solving part (b) of a problem, *don't* use the rounded version of part (a). Keep using the exact value, or else the rounding errors might grow past the 2% threshold that WebAssign is using.

- **You usually don't have to simplify your answers.** For normal type-in-the-answer problems, WebAssign will accept something like $(5*7)/(3+(8*12))$. So if you're worried about rounding errors when you convert to decimal, don't convert to decimal. For the special entry problems where you click buttons to write different mathematical symbols, you should just write the exact answer and leave it unsimplified. One exception: if WebAssign specifically tells you to simplify, then you should simplify.
- **Make sure you're following the format of the question.** If WebAssign puts parentheses around the entry box (for example, when the answer is an ordered pair), *don't* write your own set of parentheses or it will be marked wrong.
- **Use WebAssign's notation.** If a problem specifies that you should write "DNE" when the answer does not exist, write "DNE" exactly. "None," "does not exist," "undefined" or any other variations will be marked wrong. Sometimes WebAssign will tell you to write multiple answers separated by a comma, so you should do that.
- **Check those units.** Sometimes a problem will give you data in feet per second, but the answer box says "minutes".
- **When in doubt, ask me.** I'm always happy to tell you if there are any formatting problems, so if you think your answer is correct, email me and I can take a look.
- **Finally, relax.** Your final homework grade will be out of thousands of points' worth of problems. Any given point you miss counts for less than one hundredth of one percent of your final grade. This guide is to help you use WebAssign so that you can get the correct feedback on your solutions. Don't worry too much about your score.

Thanks to Jonah Ostroff