

111/120/4/5/6 Beginning of Quarter Checklist and Notes

1. Create calendar (decide on exam dates and roughly decide on homework due dates)
2. Create syllabus (give general course information, include grade break down, exam dates, make-up rules, information about office hours and places to get help, etc.)
3. If your class uses webassign, then set up the webassign visible and due dates. (see webassign notes below). You may not have access to webassign until the Thursday or Friday before the quarter starts, so plan on spending some time on the weekend before classes start (or the first day of class) to set up the due dates.
4. Make plans for the first week for your TAs. What should they do Tuesday and Thursday of the first week? Meet with them and discuss this plan. And lay out the TA duties for the quarter.
5. Optionally, set up a basic website or place you can post things (Can play around with catalyst/canvas tools if you want).
6. Optionally, set up a catalyst/canvas gradebook. (You cannot post grades on your website, use catalyst or canvas to post grades)
7. Make a course email list through myUW. Also, check to make sure time and location of final are listed correctly on myUW. The final is the last day of class during the summer.
8. Print a picture class list from myUW.
9. Link course to your website (if you have one) through myUW.
10. Decide on homework for first week (and beyond).
11. Check out your classroom. Figure out what kinds of pen/chalk you need and write a few things on the board to and walk around the classroom to figure out if all the students will be able to see. If there is something wrong with the technology in the classroom contact (including needing mylar):
035 Kane Hall, 206-543-9900, classrm@uw.edu
If the room has major problems, tell someone in the advising office (Padelford C-36) and they can request a new room.
12. Make first lecture.

Other notes on first week:

Overloads: Deflect overload requests. Say something like:

"No overloads are given for Math 111/120/124/5/6, if you want a seat in the class you will have to keep checking online in hopes that a seat opens up in the first week"

Grading: Be ready to answer general grading questions, see the next page.

Be clear: Be clear with the students about the exam dates, rules, expectations, due dates, etc... You need to clearly point these things out on the syllabus and possibly write them on the board.

Getting help: Let students know about all their help resources. Remind them of your office hours (each of the first three lectures and at least once a week). If you are sharing office hours, let them know about other instructor office hours. Also let them know about the math study center. We want students to use these resources!!! Please spend some time writing up these resources on the board.

Grading

Please read carefully through the UW policies and best practices for grading here:

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/practices/>

The expected median for Math 111/120/124/5/6 is 2.9. The official policy of the department is:

Math 124/5/6 Grade Policy. Beginning Autumn 2012, the department of mathematics has adopted a grade policy for this course. The final median course grades for each lecture section of Math 124/5/6 taught during the regular academic year will fall within the range of 2.9 +/- 0.2. This policy does not apply to the honors sections of Math 124/5/6.

We are particularly concerned with the following grade marks:

For Math 111/124/5/6: The grade necessary to move on into the next course is a 2.0.

For Math 120: The grade necessary to move on into the next course is a 2.5.

I try to look for a very clear divide between those moving on and those that don't. So for Math 111/124/5/6, I typically make sure no one gets a 1.9 (and I try to avoid 1.8 and 1.7 as well if I can). I want there to be a large difference between those that move on and those that don't.

How I Handle Grades:

1. I post grades three times. After the first midterm, after the second midterm, and after the final.
2. For each exam, I get the exam statistics and make a gradescale (in excel) as follows:
 - a. I make the median correspond to 2.9
(so if the median exam 1 score is 74%, I correspond 74% to 2.9).
 - b. I decide on what grade is necessary for a 4.0 and what grade is necessary for a 2.0.
 - c. Then I made a piecewise linear scale from 2.9 to 4.0 and 2.0 to 2.9.
(If it's possible to hit my median about right I try to make it just linear from 2.0 to 4.0)
 - d. I extend the gradescale below 2.0 typically in a linear way. Usually anyone below 50% gets a 0.0 in my class.
3. I turn each student's scores into a percentage out of 100, and then I translate the grades using my gradescale.

3. I then review my gradescale and look a bit at the percentages of students in each group. That is when I look at this: <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/practices/guidelines.html>

For a lower level class, the UW faculty resource on grading roughly suggestions

3.5-4.0: 18% of class, 2.9-3.4: 26% of class, 1.9-2.8: 39% of class, 0.0-1.8: 17% of class

These are only rough estimates.

For example, in my classes, the number of students below 2.0 ranges from 8% to 15% typically depending on how many weak students there are in the class.

Other Notes:

- Often when I post midterm grades, I set the median to 2.8 instead of 2.9. Then the midterm grade is a bit of a low estimate which I think is good motivation for the students, and it gives you some room to move up their grade at the end.
- Catalyst has the ability to create a piecewise linear gradescale if you want to use it. I personally like to download the files and use the full functionality of excel, but you may have to learn how to use excel to do this (I can give you a quick lesson this summer on how to quickly use excel in making grades if you are interested).
- It is good to be transparent at the end of the quarter about grades. I like to send out an email to my classes that very clearly gives the grade statistics, highlighting the median, quartiles and often a few percentages of students at various grades. I also typically provide the link to the UW grading guidelines website so they can compare my grades to the UW suggested guidelines. I think being clear and provided this information cuts down on questions.

Webassign Notes:

Webassign: Math 111/120/124/5/6 now have homework done through webassign. The assignments are already created by the department. But you will need to set the due dates. Since the summer lectures are longer, the homework due dates may need to be adjusted slightly week to week. You can also ask me, or your fellow TA's about getting set up.

Webassign access code notes:

- a. Students need to purchase access if they are taking Math 111 (that code is good for 111 and 112), Math 120 (that code is good for 120), or Math 124 (that code is good for 124/5/6 and 324) Instructions for how to purchase are available on previous instructor syllabi.
- b. Or the student can purchase a hard copy of the book at the bookstore with the access code.
- c. If the student is on your catalyst roster, then they can get into webassign (even without an access code for the first two weeks). As the students log into webassign for the first time, their name is added to the webassign list.
- d. They can also call webassign, the number is (800) 955-8275 with questions.

Switching sections: If a student begins the work in one class, then switches classes. A new **blank** set of assignments will be generated for the student in the new class. If you want to give them credit for their work in the other class, talk to the other instructors and find out their progress (and add this to their overall scores on that assignment).

Using webassign:

Adjusting due dates: Go to “Classview”, then click the “all” tab above the assignments.

A link should appear below all the assignments that says “Class Schedule”. Click on that link and you can see First Visible, Due Date, and Last Visible dates which you can set for each assignment. Generally, we set the “first visible” date to be about 7-10 days before the due date for that particular assignment. The last visible date for all assignments should be some time after finals week.

Adjusting individual grades/extensions: From the “Classview” click on “Roster”.

Then find the student that you want to adjust the grade or grant an extension and click on “scores”. From this page you can navigate to the desired assignment and grant extensions or override the homework score.

Downloading scores: From the “Classview” click on “Scoreview”. From here you can view the progress of your class on various assignments. Once you are viewing the assignments you want, you can click “download” to get a spreadsheet of the scores for the class.

Editing assignments: From “Classview”, click on the assignment. Then you can scroll down and look at the problems in the current assignment. For each problem you can adjust the amount it is worth and the number of submissions allowed. You can also click on “question browser” to navigate to other problems from the book to add to your assignment.

Some weird issues with webassign: If a student gets numbers in sequence (012345...) when they try to type anything into a calcpad problem, then they have a keylogging problem. They must turn their security keylogging off (Xfinity GuardedID must be disable).

For any other unusual issues, here is what I tell them

1. Try a different browser (sometimes the problem is specific to a certain browser/plug-ins). You can download Chrome and Firefox in a few minutes and quickly see if the problem is solved by using a different browser.
2. Try a different computer. Try a classmates compute or a computer lab computer. This will tell you if the issue is specific to your computer or not.
3. If it is still not working after you have tried the above, then call webassign customer service. (They can also help you diagnose browser/plug-in issues as well).
4. If customer service does not resolve your issue, then immediately email your instructor explaining what you have tried and what customer service has said to you. Your instructor can then decide how to proceed (possible homework extensions or adjustments).

For small classes, like your summer classes, you can also tell the student to write out their answers for that particular problem and show the answer to you (in an emergency situation where webassign isn't working for some reason this is a feasible fix in a small class).

Exam Writing

One of the most time consuming jobs of an instructor is exam writing and exam grading. This is how you communicate with students, how you find out how they are doing, and it is the source of the most friction between students and instructors. So it is important to be thoughtful in how you create your exams.

In addition to reading my notes below, please also read Judith Arm's comments about writing exams here:
<http://www.math.washington.edu/~arms/m3xx.guide/exams.html>

She has some good advice.

Here are some bits of advice from me:

1. Exams should be like homework. Try to use wording that is just like the homework.
For freshman and sophomore level math classes, most of the questions should be very similar in form and content to questions they have seen.
2. For a 50 minute exam, I personally like to make four page exams (so they have 10 minutes a page, plus 10 minutes at the end). For an 80 minute exam, I personally like to make five page exams.
3. It is good to have at least one problem that makes them adapt the concepts a little bit in order to see that they really understand what they are doing (and to separate the strong students from the weak ones). But, at the same time, you want the majority of students to be able to at least start each problem and make some progress (that is, be conscious of the situation where part (b) depends on part (a)).
4. It is also good to have at least one very standard problem. If a student missed the standard problem, then you know that they are really not keeping up with the material.

Here is my exam writing process:

1. About a week before the exam, I randomly write down several questions. I pull from homework and common questions in office hours. I try to cover all the main concepts. I often make a checklist of topics and make sure that all are included.
2. I then sit down with my random assortment of questions and write solutions. In doing so, I cut down the problems to four or five pages and make sure the difficulty is appropriate.
3. To get an idea of difficulty, I pull up a few old midterms and finals and compare my questions with questions on the old exams. If my exam is much easier (or much more challenging) than old exams in the archive, then I try to modify my problems to the appropriate difficulty.
4. Once I think I have a good solid final draft, I work through the exam one more time and write up very detailed solutions. I also think about how to break up the points.
5. I scan these solutions in (or type them up). And I write a grading rubric.
6. Then I make copies of the exam for my classes.