

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
PHYSICS EDUCATION OFFICE

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DATE: September 30, 2003  
TO: Students Taking Freshmen Physics  
FROM: Prof. Thomas Greytak, Associate Department Head for Education

I hope that you are all satisfied with your choice of physics subject this term and that you are enjoying your classes. Now that you have all had your first exam, this is an appropriate time to remind you of some important information.

**Your grade will be based on mastery of the material.** The final grades in physics are based on mastery of the material. In fact, this should be the case in all subjects at MIT (Section 2.62 of the *Rules and Regulations of the Faculty*). In particular, grades are not awarded on the basis of predetermined percentages. You are not competing with your fellow students. In practice, the staff in each subject decides on the grading break points at the end of the term, taking into consideration the difficulty of the exams that were given during that particular term. One would then expect that the break points would change from term to term. However, we have found that in our large freshman subjects that have covered basically the same material for several years, the variation is not large. The lecturer in your subject will tell you what the minimum passing grade was the last term the subject was taught. Note that, as in the stock market, past performance is no guarantee of future results. The break points will be higher if we feel the exams this term were consistently easier than in previous years, lower if we feel the exams were measurably harder.

**If you are not doing as well as you would like, now is the time to seek help.** You should begin by discussing your situation with your recitation instructor. Tutoring help is available in each of our freshman courses. The Office of the Dean for Student Affairs is also a valuable resource. They offer special help in study skills and time management.

**Be particularly careful if your grades are just above the threshold for passing.** Historically we have found that students' last exam scores are often lower than their previous average. This is not because the last (or final) exam is harder than the previous ones, nor is the material measurably more difficult. Probably, it is a result of students getting increasingly behind as the term progresses, and the fact that many pressures come to bear during the last weeks of the term. This seems to be a fact of life at MIT. You should be aware of it, and plan accordingly.

**You must pass 8.01 before taking 8.02.** Some version of 8.01 is a prerequisite for any version of 8.02. Students will not be allowed to take 8.02 in the spring term unless they have passed (received a "C-" or better) one of the versions of 8.01. Students who fail 8.01 are not allowed to take 8.01 and 8.02 simultaneously.

**The enrollment in 8.02X will be limited.** Due to seating limitations in the lecture hall, the enrollment in spring term 8.02X will be limited to 160 students. A lottery will be used, if necessary, to choose among the other students wishing to take the subject.