

6.055J/2.038J (Spring 2010)

Grading policy

As I explained in lecture, and want to formalize here, all the grading in this course is based not on correctness but on effort. The reasons are several. First, it would be absurd to grade on correctness in a course on making lots of approximations and in which I keep insisting that being wrong is good for learning. Second, effort is something over which you have full control, whereas correctness is much harder to control. I therefore want to remove any anxiety based on the thought, 'Did I get it right or will I get slapped down with a bad grade?' It interferes with learning a useful and enjoyable subject.

The effort-based grading scale is P/D/F, with the following meanings and numerical conversions.

- P (worth 1.0) Decent effort
- D (worth 0.5) Indecent effort
- F (worth 0.0) No effort

The graded assignments fall into several categories.

<i>Weight</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
15%	desert-island diagnostic pretest	once
30	reading memos	3/week
25	homework sets	1/week
10	solution-set memos	1/week
20	final exam	once

The individual scores for each item will be averaged; for example, to get a homework score from 0 to 1. Then the category scores will be adding using the weights in the preceding table. The resulting number will be converted to A/B/C/D/F as follows:

- ≥ 0.9 A
- ≥ 0.8 B
- ≥ 0.7 C
- ≥ 0.6 D
- < 0.6 F

What is a reasonable effort

For a reasonable effort on a reading memo (i.e. for a homework or solution memo), one comment is not enough unless it's unusual in its thoughtfulness. Ten comments is far more than needed (but feel free to make as many as you are inspired to make). Hence, somewhere between 1 and 10 – call it a 'few' – is about right (here, 'few' doesn't literally mean 3).

For a reasonable effort on the homeworks, give a coherent one- or two-sentence explanation or reasoning for each problem. If you cannot solve a problem in a reasonable time (I don't want you to lose sleep!), don't worry: Make a guess and use the explanation box for the basis of your guess. If you solve a problem, use the explanation box for what John Wheeler recommended: Write down what you could tell your earlier self in order to make finding the solution smooth sailing. By the end of the course you will have built a library of useful problem-solving ideas.

Late policy

Completing assignments on time helps you stay abreast of the material and thereby learn it well. To binge at the end is an ineffective way to learn, so I have tried to create structures that make it easy to do effective things.

That said, the world is messy. Difficult circumstances arise. Therefore, with a dean's note or a doctor's note, I will postpone any deadline, no questions asked, for as long as seems reasonable in the circumstances.

In addition to that unlimited license, you may take *three* free, 1-week extensions on the homeworks. There is no need to prearrange or tell me which homework it is. Just submit it (electronically) within the extra week. The online system will automatically deduce what happened and give the extension. For the corresponding solution-set memo, you automatically get an extra week.

You may also take up to *eight* free extensions on the reading memos. The extension is for 1 week. Again, no need to prearrange; just use them when you need to, submit the memos by the new deadline, and the programs and web scripts will eventually figure it out.