

## THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WEBASSIGN

### **WebAssign can be a good learning tool.**

Where else can you enter a wrong answer, correct your mistake and then still get full credit? How many times have you lost points on a written assignment or exam because you forgot a minus sign or left out a term in your steps? This is your opportunity to catch those mistakes without being penalized. It is also a good opportunity to practice the precise writing of expressions. We're very picky about writing things properly in math, not unlike your composition/ English instructor. And one of the best advantages is that you immediately know if you're correct or not. There's nothing worse than doing problems incorrectly and not finding out until the graded papers are returned the following week. Because information in one section is often needed for the following section, due dates can be quicker (and more flexible) to help you practice the material on a timely basis. And nothing is perfect. That's why we also collect written work and give quizzes.

### **Pay attention to the variable.**

Problems seem so much easier when you use  $x$ , don't they? Do you have a habit of purposely changing the letter to  $x$  before working through a problem? You will definitely encounter many different letters here, including some Greek letters. Don't be surprised when we deduct points on a hand-written homework if you use the wrong letter. Using parameters for the randomized values really helps when discussing homework problems with your instructor and other students.

### **After two attempts, stop and redo the problem or look in your notes.**

Common sense seems to go out the window after two attempts. Your attempts shouldn't look radically different unless you were way off in the first place. Trial and error shouldn't be a strategy. With only 5 attempts on the symbolic answers, you can't afford to randomly try different answers. In many cases your first attempt is the closest. And don't guess at an answer before attempting the problem. Besides gaining little if you're correct, you've also wasted an attempt.

### **Don't enter an equivalent expression when your attempt is marked wrong.**

If you just entered  $x*(x+2)$  and it was marked wrong, your second attempt shouldn't be  $(x+2)*x$ . It is not true that the program will only accept the answer in a specific way. The software behind the scenes matches expressions that are mathematically equivalent. Don't send your instructor an email starting with "WebAssign says my correct answer is wrong, what does it want?" It is extremely rare that a correct answer will be marked wrong. Your instructor can view all of your responses to a question. They can often tell what you are doing wrong by looking at your answers.

### **Leaving out parentheses is not the careless mistake you think it is.**

$x*(x+2)$  is not the same as  $x*x+2$ . In a free response answer you will see your expression before having to submit it. Make sure it is exactly what you intended to write. The CalcPad that is used in WebAssign allows you to enter expressions manually or with a drop down menu for preset mathematical symbols.

**Simplify your answers.**

You just computed a derivative and your result is messy. You now have a decision to make. One choice is to enter that mess and take your chances. Unfortunately, if instructions say "simplify your final answer" on a written assignment or an exam, you will lose points. WebAssign is allowing you to practice this skill too. Your second choice is to simplify your answer and then enter that. If your answer is marked wrong, you'll need to determine if your original derivative calculation is wrong or if your simplification is wrong. Checking both is the best practice you can get.

**Trial and error is not an efficient way to answer a problem.**

This is especially true if the number of attempts allowed is small. That particular strategy is also useless on an exam, so why rely on it here?

**We can't help you if you don't record your work clearly on paper.**

If you can't remember what you did to get your answer two days ago, we certainly can't. Well, we probably can, but we won't let you off the hook that easy. Using an on-line grading system is not an excuse to be sloppy. And this is important not just for the moment when you are doing your assignment, but also when you are studying for a quiz or exam later.

**Not reading the problem carefully has consequences.**

You've just used up an attempt because you didn't see the word NOT in the instructions. The advantage here is that you find that out immediately instead of two or three days later when you get your graded paper back. Take advantage of this. Reread the problem first.

**Did you struggle with a handwritten assignment but "easily" completed the corresponding WebAssign assignment?**

This sounds similar to the "I did all of the homework problems just fine, but I can't do your tests" that we sometimes hear. There are definitely connections and finding them is part of the learning process. Can you summarize what you did in this section/assignment? Can you use any of the approaches you used in the WebAssign problems or was your work haphazard? Was your goal to just get as many points as you could on the WebAssign assignment or did you really work through the problems and learn from your mistakes? How many attempts does it usually take for you to get a correct answer?