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How do grades work?

No points. No percentages.

Just a collection of B tasks and a separate collection of A tasks.

What's a B task?

B tasks are problems for collaboration during our virtual sessions. I'll put you & your group in a Zoom breakout room to work on them together. Submit your responses through the Discussions tab in Canvas.

We can work together?

Yes. Learning is a social activity. Actually, it's a psychological event, but it occurs in a social context. Consult with others, construct your own understanding, submit your own work, and give credit to the people who helped you. Cite the scholars and sources you found helpful. That's academic integrity.

What's an A task?

A tasks are more involved than B tasks. They require a lot more work (outside of class), and require in-depth analysis and connections between topics. They're opportunities for you to show that you really know what you're doing.

So how do I get, say, a B?

Do the B tasks.

That's it?

That's it.

What if I only want a C?

Why would you want that? You can get a B. Just do the B tasks.

OK. How do I get an A?

Do the B tasks and the A tasks.

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The A tasks sound hard.

Yes. That's why you'll get an A. But they're totally doable, especially with a good group.

We can do A tasks in groups?

Yes. See the "We can work together?" section on page 1.

How do I find a good group?

Ay, there's the rub. Surround yourself with excellent people. Sooner or later, you'll be mistaken for one. Trust me. I've been doing that my whole damn life.

How do you grade the tasks?

I use these symbols, like in the diagram:
  + means "complete"
  * means "exemplary"
  Y means "not yet complete"
  X means "Jeff won't evaluate anymore"

+ We're good 🙂

* Awesome! 😎

Y Not yet 🤔 two weeks

X Let it go 😐

hooray!

poop!

What's "not yet" mean?

It means you haven't (yet) completed that task. Y is a temporary grade & lasts about two weeks. When you complete the task, I change the Y to a +. Hooray!

If you don't complete the task in that time, and you don't actively engage with me about your progress, I change the Y to an X. Poop! My ability to effectively help you manage your learning on past-due tasks expires eventually; at some point I just don't have the bandwidth. So let it go. Focus on more recent work.

To help avoid X grades, be proactive and keep me informed about your situation. Due dates are helpful to keep our class on track, but I can be flexible. What I won't do is die from exhaustion, get a divorce, or be a deadbeat dad. I have a lot on my plate in addition to serving you.

When you continually push off due dates and fail to respect my time and the effort I put into our class, you overload my bandwidth. In those cases, I reserve the right to assign you an X grade. To avoid this, do your best to get these done within two weeks of the original due date. In all situations, keep me posted about your learning needs.

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Can I get an A if I get * marks on all the B tasks?

> No. Those are B tasks. See "How do I get an A?"
> But earning several * marks on B tasks sounds a lot like a B+, doesn't it?

What if I do all the B tasks and try the A tasks but can't really complete them?

> I dunno. If you give them a good try, seems like a B+ at least would be fair, doesn't it? Did you do some work that was really good, just not all of it? Maybe an A-? Seems like it kinda depends on the quality of what you do. What do you think? What feels right?

What if I don't or can't complete all the B tasks?

> There are other grades available (B-, C+, C, D, & F) depending on how many and which tasks you have to let go. COVID is real & it's not the only challenge out there.

How many B tasks can I let go and still pass the class?

> You're killin' me. See "What if I only want a C?" If you're letting stuff go, I'll notice & be in touch. Foothill's got lots of good people who want you to succeed as much as you do.

What about timed midterms?

> Just say no to timed midterms. They don't reveal anything meaningful about learning.

No, no. That's OK. I'm good with no timed exams. What about a timed final exam?

> If you want, I can send you some problems and arrange a ten-minute Zoom conference where you tell me about your work. If you demonstrate that you really know what you're doing, I can use that evidence to support a higher grade. Nothing lower, though.

Is there extra credit?

> Hell no.

> Well, actually there is exactly one task that is extra credit. But it's the hardest task in the whole class and requires deep knowledge from my linear algebra class. Ask me about it if you're interested. I can tell you right now, this task is designed for people who want an A+! It's the hardest task in the entire class. So… I won't engage in a conversation about this unless I see that you are on track to earn an A.

Mostly written by Patrick Morriss

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Got it. Anything else?

Yeah. Sometimes people say or do stuff that shows deep understanding and really helps other people learn. I can't predict how or when that might happen, but when I see it, I record a +1😊. At the end, I can use +1😊s to justify a higher grade.

Isn't that like extra credit?

Wow. You really want extra credit, don't you?

I can't assign any task for a +1😊, I just try to catch it when it happens. How about this? I'll also record +1😊 every time someone gives you credit for helping them (See "We can work together?" on page 1). Can we go with that?

Sure. So can I give +1😊s to other people?

Yep. Every task ends with this integrity practice: "Please cite any scholars or sources you found helpful." When you cite a helpful scholar, I'll record a +1😊 for them.

Cool! Can I give a +1😊 to myself?

Really? Did you just ask that? No, you can't give a +1😊 to yourself. You get them from other people when you're helpful in a way that works for them. Try that.

I will. Are there -1😊 s?

Nah. That'd just be mean. Could you imagine +1☹️? Got some people in mind you'd like to give those to? Yeah, let's not do that...

What if I have more questions?

Speak to me before, during, or after class. Hit me up using the chat in zoom. Make an appointment to hang with me during student time. Text me at my Google Voice number at (650) 383 – 7194. Let's talk.