Guide to TA Hours

Fall 2017

Contents

1 SignMeUp .............................. 1
2 Hours Etiquette ..................... 2
3 Testing ............................... 3
4 Express Line .......................... 3
5 Collaboration Policy ................. 4
6 An alternative opportunity for clarification: Workshop .......................... 4

Objectives

These guidelines are designed with the intent of giving all students equal access to TA hours. Please read them carefully to ensure that you fully understand them, and in particular, to ensure that you fully understand the collaboration policy as it relates to TA hours.

1 SignMeUp

For CS 17, we will be using software called SignMeUp to handle lines during hours. You can access the site from any computer or mobile device. Simply login using your banner username and password, and enter your hours question. You must enter a question in order to be helped by a TA. Simply entering “hw” or “problem 2” is not sufficient. If you do not enter a specific question related to the scope of the class, you will not be helped by a TA and you will have to sign up again.

Examples of acceptable questions:

• What is this part of problem 3 asking for?

• I need help debugging an error that says “undefined”

• I’m confused about the base case for problem 1.

• I need help understanding how to do analysis.

Examples of unacceptable questions:

• hw
You may check the queue (and sign up!) by going to:

https://signmeup.cs.brown.edu/

If for any reason SignMeUp is not working, you should (of course!) still come to hours. We will use old-fashioned technology to store the queue (a whiteboard, in which you write your name at the bottom of a list of names upon arrival).

2 Hours Etiquette

We ask that you abide by proper “etiquette” as it pertains to hours, which we articulate below:

• We hold hours nearly every day of the week. While we understand that occasionally you may have a last minute question on an assignment that is due in short order, making your question seem urgent, please try to come to hours well in advance of an assignment’s due date. We will not prioritize students’ questions based on their assignments’ due dates.

• There are a lot of you and only a few of us. In order to help as many students as possible, a TA can only spend up to 15 minutes helping you (per signup). If the line is too long and the TA deems so necessary, this time may be lowered to 10 minutes.
  – During these 15 minutes, you may ask any questions you have about CS18 concepts or assignments.

• We expect you to attempt to solve your problem on your own before coming to hours. As proof that you have done so, you should not come to hours without having at least attempted to work out a thorough set of test cases. Test cases provide evidence of your efforts to understand and solve the problem on your own.

  Of course, if you do not understand the problem well enough to even begin to write down test cases, you may still come to hours for help. But usually the sorts of clarification questions that would help you understand the problem can be asked and answered on Piazza or email, and do not necessitate coming to hours.

  So, in almost all cases, we expect students to arrive at hours having already worked through several germane test cases.

• If you get an error when you run your code, read the error message and try to debug your program on your own before coming to hours. The TAs are not obliged to help you with debugging, and usually will not have much time, so they will frown upon you if you haven’t made any attempt to understand the error yourself.
In order to speed up debugging, come in to hours ready with a few comments detailing what you have tried.

- TAs will not answer any questions that can be answered by a quick and easy review of information on our website or Piazza.
- Express lines are for lab check-offs.
- When you come to hours, don’t shove your computer in your TA’s face. Because we want you to understand and be able to explain your code and walk through the problem solving process, TAs will not look at your code unless necessary (this will usually only be necessary for debugging).
- If you are not present at hours when your name is called, you have 15 minutes to show up. After the 15 minutes, your name will be erased and you will have to sign up for hours again.
- Please do not approach the TA staff outside hours (in the Sunlab, the CIT, the dorms, the dining halls, etc.) with questions about 17. TAs are students too, and they have their own work to complete.
- When working with a partner on a project, only one of you may be signed up on the queue for project-related questions at a time. However, if one partner has a non-project-related questions, you may both sign up at the same time.

3 Testing

As mentioned above, in order to be helped during hours, you must have test cases prepared (when relevant). The only exceptions are the following:

- Conceptual questions (i.e., “What’s recursion?”)
- Clarification questions (i.e., “What’s this problem asking?”)
- Logistical questions (i.e., “grades, schedules, etc.”)
- Questions related to analysis

Failure to have test cases when necessary will result in you not being helped by the TA and having to sign up again.

4 Express Line

There will always be two lines during hours— an “Hours” line and an “express” line. Express lines are intended for lab check-offs and 30 second clarification questions. If your question will take more than 30 seconds to answer, the TA will talk with you for 30 secs, and then direct you to the regular signup queue.
5 Collaboration Policy

As stated in the course collaboration policy, we believe that discussing problems with your classmates is a valuable learning experience for all parties involved. However, homework is your chance to demonstrate your own personal understanding of the course material. So while you may discuss homework assignments with your fellow students, you may not code together or take away any notes from your discussions. A good rule of thumb is that when you finish a discussion, you shouldn’t start writing code or notes or anything else until you’ve had enough time to grab a cup of coffee with a friend.

While waiting in line at hours, you may use your laptop if you are sitting by yourself, not interacting with anyone else. If, however, you are sitting with a group of people, all of your laptops (and other electronic devices like tablets and phones) must be closed and/or off, regardless of whether you are discussing the assignment or banana stands.

6 An alternative opportunity for clarification: Workshop

As an added resource, we are now holding Workshop. To learn more about workshop, please refer to the course missive. It is important to note that TAs during hours will not answer questions about workshop exercises just as TAs will not answer questions about course assignments during Workshop. For Workshop-related questions, you should attend Workshop (if you cannot attend Workshop, feel free to email the TA list).

Please let us know if you find any mistakes, inconsistencies, or confusing language in this or any other CS17 document by filling out the anonymous feedback form:

http://cs.brown.edu/courses/cs017/feedback