Guide to TA Hours
Fall 2018

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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.

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
- debugging
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 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). During these 15 minutes, you may ask any questions you have about CS17 concepts or assignments. We reserve the right to lower this time depending on the length of the queue.

- 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 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.

- 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.

- We want you to understand and be able to explain your code and walk through the problem solving process, and as such, 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 CS17. 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.

• If there is a group discussion held between a TA and multiple students, you are not permitted to take notes, nor are you allowed to have a laptop out.

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 solely for lab check-offs. Note, however, if the TA deems that your lab is incomplete, they will tell you what is missing, but you must sign up in the regular queue for assistance with it.

5 An alternative opportunity for clarification: Workshop

In addition to TA hours, we also hold workshops on various topics throughout the year. Workshops will typically follow the format of a presentation, but will also include worksheets and practice problems for TAs to go through which are directly applicable to the given week’s homework assignments. Additionally, during project weeks, we will be including project “gear ups” in order to prepare students for the daunting projects that lay ahead of them.

Lastly, workshops are also great opportunities for students to ask more general questions and discuss the topics covered in class. Typically, workshops will be held twice week, so keep your eyes open for them!
Please let us know if you find any mistakes, inconsistencies, or confusing language in this or any other CS 17 document by filling out the anonymous feedback form: http://cs.brown.edu/courses/csci0170/feedback.