Guide to TA Hours
Spring 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, and in particular, to ensure that you fully understand the collaboration policy as it relates to TA hours.

1 SignMeUp

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. You also must specify which homework problem, lab, or project you are working on. 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
- problem 1
- analysis
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. However, you may only receive help on one assignment during this time (i.e., not both a homework and a project).

- 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. However, 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.
• The express line is 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 CS18. TAs are students too, and they have their own work to complete.

• When working with a partner on a project, you must both be signed up on the queue together, even if only one partner is present at TA hours. This does not mean writing your partner’s name in the question, but adding your partner’s email address alongside yours when joining the queue. This means that while you are both in line, you may not sign up for help with other assignments as well.

3 Lines Policy

During hours, the TAs will maintain two lists on SignMeUp and answer questions from the two lists either in parallel or in an interleaving fashion.

Express Line  The express line is for people who need checkoffs for completed labs. You must have completed the lab in its entirety to sign up for a lab check-off; TAs will not answer questions about the lab in this line.

Regular Line  The second/regular line is for all questions about concepts covered in class, your individual solutions or code, or grade questions or complaints for the specific TA on hours. If the hours line is not empty, the TAs will choose to limit the time spent with each student to a maximum of fifteen minutes. If you need more time with the TAs after your time expires, feel free to join the hours line again.

We encourage you to use the waiting time during TA hours to collaborate with other students in the class (in accordance with the collaboration policy, of course!). Perhaps another student in the class can answer your question before the TAs can. As a reminder, you may not code together, look at each others’ code, or take away notes from your discussions. Refer to the collaboration policy (posted on the course homepage) for details.

Please let us know if you find any mistakes, inconsistencies, or confusing language in this or any other CS18 document by filling out the anonymous feedback form: [http://cs.brown.edu/courses/cs018/feedback](http://cs.brown.edu/courses/cs018/feedback)