Collaboration Policy

Some CS courses at Brown allow virtually no cooperation or discussion between students. Some students and TAs feel that these policies may stifle the learning process and have spoken out in favor of a more liberal and honor system-based policy that depends on the maturity of the students to know what work should be their own and what they can share with their peers.

CSCI 1270 encourages collaboration and discussion to stimulate a better learning environment. We provide the following guidelines without exceeding the Academic Code (see Basic Policy, Principles of the Brown University Community). See the class syllabus for a summary of these guidelines.

You should do your own thinking, your own design, and your own coding (note that AI tools like ChatGPT and Claude are allowed as of Fall 2026). You are allowed to talk to other students about the content of the lectures, the textbook, and about high-level concepts in general. You may answer questions from other students about packages used for assignments as long as the problem is narrow and not one that helps in the problem-solving process at large.

For debugging assistance, **collaboration hours** should be your first priority. For more information on collaboration hours, please see this guide. As a last resort, if you are unable to go to collaboration hours or you can not figure out your problem in collaboration hours, you can create a private Edstem post asking for debugging help by following the template provided in Edstem. Note that debugging on Edstem may not be efficient and should not be considered as a first option.

What is not allowed is that you let yourself be led by another student (or another student's resources) to the extent that your task becomes significantly less challenging because of your discussion with them. More specifically, you should do your own problem-solving, program design and decomposition, and data structure design. In conversation with other students, be sure not to venture into design and coding specifics and, especially, never sit down to discuss an assignment with someone else before you have analyzed the problem in depth on your own.

The most blatant violation that can occur is code copying. This will not be tolerated. We reserve the right to do a "wire-pull test" (i.e., ask you to explain your program). In addition, we will use highly reliable tools to compare your code to that of other students (including assignments from years past) for violations. In a similar vein, if you are working on department machines, make sure that all of your coursework on the filesystem has the proper permissions so that other students cannot view and potentially copy your work. See chmod(1) or ask a consultant for help if you don't know how to go about this. Failure to do this can potentially be viewed as a violation of the academic code. Finally, **while AI is allowed for DBMS as of Fall 2026, students may under no circumstances share AI-written code, links to AI chat logs containing code, or other AI-generated resources that are code-specific.**

Here are some important additional considerations:

- Beginning with the Fall 2026 iteration of DBMS, **AI tools** (ChatGPT, Claude) are permitted on all coding assignments. Note that we still reserve the right to do a "wire-pull" test on any submissions and have restructured the course to check for deeper-level understanding of project content.
- You must not ask questions on Stack Overflow or any similar site or service. Of course, if you search for programming problems on the Internet, some answers may come up; just don't ask questions about the assignment code yourself.
- You must not use solutions from past years. Do not post your code or solutions in a public place

or make them available to future students.

- Acknowledge the help you get from others. If a classmate, another collaborator, or an online tool/service helps you, acknowledge this in your assignment submission. Name the helpers and briefly describe how they helped. You do not need to cite help from course staff.
- If you are unsure about what you can or can't discuss with a peer, ask on EdStem. TAs should always be your first resource when you have a course-related policy question or problem.

We believe that this policy is explicit enough to guide your judgment and that we have not left you many gray areas. If you are ever in doubt about the legality of your actions, be sure to clear them with the instructor or a TA, even if only after the event has occurred. When we confront a student with a case of suspected violation, an answer of "I didn't know that this was wrong" is not likely to find much sympathy. Be sure that no part of this document is unclear to you and follow it to a tee. Remember that this policy is meant to encourage, not penalize or criminalize, collaboration: collaborate well and collaborate fully, just make sure that you collaborate legally as well.