

Writing Up Homework Handout

Homework is not just busy work, and it is not a punishment for students! The point of homework is to practice what you have learned so that you will understand it better and perform better on exams. Homework should also serve as your primary study guide when preparing for an exam.

- In order to use your homework as a study guide, you need to *write it legibly and with enough detail* that you can follow it later. Keep this in mind as you write up your homework: In two or three weeks, will I remember why I did this step? If not, write it down!
- Keep it *organized in a 3-ring binder*. Also, remember to put the chapter and section on each page. *Number your problems* like this 3.1.13, so that you know later it came from chapter 3, section 1, problem 13.
- I actually keep two 3-ring binders for each class. The larger binder is for everything (Syllabus, notes, quizzes, exams, etc.), the smaller for current notes and homework. After each exam, I remove the notes and homework and store them in the large binder.
- Put homework in *reverse chronological order*. The most recent homeworks go on the top, so you can find them easily.
- *Mark problems you had trouble with* to ask about later. Be sure to leave at least 3-5 inches of space in your homework to finish that problem.
- You **MUST** *write the directions* to the problems AND the problem itself, or the homework cannot be used later as a study guide. If the directions are the same for problems #3-32, then write #3-32 followed by the directions.
- *Write on blank printer paper*—it's basic neuroscience and reduces mistakes.
 - *The more white space there is on the page, the faster and more accurately your brain works.*
- Write your solutions as if you were teaching it to a struggling student. Leave nothing out!

On the next page, you will find some guidelines on effectively writing up homework.

Homework Guidelines

1. Work all problems on **blank printer paper**.
2. Start every problem on the left margin. It may “waste” a little paper, but nothing wastes paper like repeating the course!
3. Do not double column your work. The more “white” or “blank” space there is, the easier it is for your brain to solve the problems. It’s not rocket science, but it is neuroscience!
4. Highlight every problem number or circle it.
5. Draw a horizontal bar between problems and leave a gap of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch between problems.
6. Keep all problems in number order. If you need to skip a problem, leave about 4–5 inches of space.
7. With the exception of word problems, copy the problem. For word problems, draw and label a picture or graph, as applicable. Homework written without the original problem cannot be used to study for exams.
8. Show all your work. No steps should be omitted, and it should be clear to a lower-level student.
9. The smaller you write, the harder it is for anyone to read, even you. And you make more mistakes, more to the point. 😬
10. Writing on the back is fine, but keep a $\frac{1}{2}$ ” margin all around the edges of the paper.
11. Circle or highlight your final solution.
12. Try to keep it neat and legible.
13. Use graph paper for graphs. It can really help solve problems when things have the right scale.
14. **Your goal is to PROVE that you know how to solve the problems, not just to solve them.**

It should look like this:

1. Find the y-intercept of $f(x) = 2x + 4$.

<i>Blah</i>	<i>Blah</i>	<i>Blah</i>	Reason/Theorem
<div style="background-color: yellow; display: inline-block; padding: 2px 5px;">$y = 4$</div>			

Or like this:

2. Find the y-intercept of $f(x) = 2x + 4$.

<i>Blah</i>	<i>Blah</i>	<i>Blah</i>	Reason/Theorem
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$y = 4$

Keeping an error log can help you identify mistakes you make repeatedly.

Sample Error Log

Error in original work	Corrected work	Description of error	When and where it occurred
$6 - 2x - 2 = 14$ $6 - 4x = 14$	$6 - 2x - 2 = 14$ $4 - 2x = 14$	Combining unlike terms	Solving linear equation in HW 2 (10/5)
$-2x = 8$ $x = 10$	$-2x = 8$ $x = -4$	Adding/subtracting when I should be dividing	Solving linear equation in HW 3 (10/7)
$5 - 2(x + 1) = 14$ $5 - 2x + 1 = 14$	$5 - 2(x + 1) = 14$ $5 - 2x - 2 = 14$	Not distributing	Solving linear equation in HW 4 (10/12)

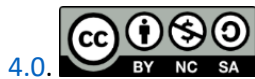
Blank Error Log

Error in original work	Corrected work	Description of error	When and where it occurred



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Reflection on Writing Up Homework

1. What makes it difficult for you to write up your homework in the way described? List 5 possible barriers.
2. How could you remove the barriers you identified in step 1? Be specific about the steps you would take.
3. If you thought writing up your homework differently would make a one letter grade difference to your final course grade, would you do it? Why or why not?
4. In the past, have you ever used your homework to study for an exam? Why or why not?