

A Short Manual for Math 150a Calculus I Online Tutoring Website

Modes of the Online Communication

The online tutoring website is operating using the Moodle platform. All students enrolled in math 150a and the instructors can log in the website. The URL for the CSUN moodle webpage is moodle.csun.edu. Additionally, the web-conference software, Elluminate, can be evoked from inside of moodle. Many Math 150a instructors use Webwork (webwork.csun.edu). It is anticipated that tutors can log in into all WebWork sections of Math 150a to be able to access the problems. Finally, Skype may be used as a substitute of Elluminate if there are cognitive barriers with the latter.

The primary mode of support, is however, through the use of Moodle forums. This provides a way to respond to student questions asynchronously in time. The time delay between the student asking question and the tutor/professor answering is intended to be minimized. In particular, during certain hours, this delay needs to be no longer than 10 minutes.

How to Use Moodle Forums to Ask and Answer Questions.

Students are instructed to log in into Moodle and use available forums to submit their calculus questions. Forums are organized according to the sections of the official textbook. In addition, there are two or three general forums that can be used to ask a new question. For example, when a student can not decide to what category the question belongs. It is expected that students will submit questions in all forums. Furthermore, it is possible that questions will be originally submitted to wrong forums. Since Moodle allows to move the question between forums, such problems can be easily resolved. The following guidelines are intended to help tutors to answer questions most effectively.

1. Students will be instructed to title their questions in a meaningful way. In particular, it is reasonable to include the section and the number of the problem as a part of the title. If it is a WebWork problem, it helps if the full name of the assignment is included in the title. *If you tutor considers the name of the question to be incomplete or confusing – the tutor may choose to include some information in the reply. For example, one can edit the title of the posting using the “Edit” option of the original topic posting. Alternatively, you make the first line of your reply something like “OK, I see you are talking about #XX from the HW XXX in Prof. XX class. This will help others to navigate better.*
2. When the student is asking the question he or she usually will not include the formulation of the problem. The question may sound like “don't really understand what the question 5a wants” or “Can you please help me with number 3”. Both of these hypothetical postings are missing the actual formulation of the problem. As a result, for an passing reader, it is difficult to catch what is going on. It is therefore recommended

to include at least some problem formulation into the discussion. If the problem is from the textbook, it would be nice to repeat the relevant part of it. If the problem is a WebWork problem --- then it is very easy to reproduce the problem in the forum by copying and pasting the entire problem from WebWork.

Reproducing the problem formulation will also help to address an important pedagogical issue discussed next.

3. *A very difficult task, that is an important part of teaching, is to determine where the other person has the difficulty.* However, it is not reasonable to give the answer before you know where the person is stumbled. If you find yourself in a situation when another person keeps ignoring your hints and answers this means that the person is not on the same page with you. In this situation it is best to go back to the beginning, that is to the problem formulation and try to walk through it again until the person is stuck. However, this time, make sure that the student takes the lead.

I teach for more than 17 years and yet I always get very surprised to the realization of how different perception of other person may be from mine. Through my teaching I have been exposed to so many different personalities and yet the breadth of possibilities to perceive and explain the same thing does not cease to fascinate me. Be mindful of that and *let your student talk*

4. You may notice that the common place forums “How to Post to a Forum” and “New Calculus Question Forum” get a lot of posts. These forums are intended to attract posts on the most recent topics and most high priority questions. This is was the original intention of creating these forums, therefore this is the normal process. However, periodically, these forums need to be cleaned by moving old discussion to a corresponding classified forum for archiving. This is best done when the topic stops receiving replies.

If you have any suggestions or have noticed a special situation that repeats and needs to be mentioned in these guidelines, please let me (Alexander.alekseenko@csun.edu) or Prof. Shubin (carol.shubin@csun.edu) know.