

Reading Assignment Guidelines

For almost every class meeting this term, you will be given a reading assignment together with two or three questions to which you must respond. Below is a description of the requirements you will need to follow to submit your responses to these questions along with some tips for reading a textbook.

These assignments will be graded on a pass/fail basis, scored either 0 or 1, based on whether the questions have answered on time and with a sincere and honest effort. The first time I feel that your effort is insufficient, I will respond with a warning message and any future submissions that are not satisfactory will then receive a grade of zero.

All questions will be sent to your university ULID or alternate email you provide at the beginning of the semester. They will be sent at least 24 hours in advance of when your responses are due, with most being sent in the evening following a class meeting. Prior to class, I will review your responses, and then selected several to use as our starting point for the day. This will also let me know before class where the difficult areas in the material can be found. These reading assignments will improve your skills at reading mathematics, strengthen your independent learning capabilities, and make our class time highly productive by ensuring that everyone is well-prepared for class.

Here are the specific details that you must adhere to when submitting your responses:

1. Your answers must be submitted via email to the following address:

hjordon@ilstu.edu

Do not send your responses to any other address.

2. Your message must be received by **8 AM** on the day of class for which it is due.
3. In order to receive credit, the message must be sent from your university ULID or alternate email provided at the beginning of the semester. In addition, you must include the following subject line for your message:

MAT 260, due date, your name.

(For example: MAT 260, 8/23, John Smith.) **THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.** I receive volumes of junk mail; you want to make sure that your message is received and counted. Failure to use the correct subject line results in a 0 for that response.

4. Your answer to each question must occur **directly below** the posed question.

5. Every question implicitly implies “Explain your answer.” Reasons count!
6. If you have a question from the reading that you wish to ask or a question in general, please do so IN ANOTHER MESSAGE to me.

Suggestions for reading a mathematics textbook:

For higher level mathematics courses such as this one, the text should NOT be viewed as simply a source for problems. Since you will have a reading assignment for most class meetings, we should think carefully about **how** we read.

1. Read with a pencil and a notebook available. Take notes on key terms, definitions, and theorems. **Math is not a spectator sport** and you will learn much more from your reading if you supplement it by note-taking.
2. When examples are provided, try to work through the details on your own. Even if the steps are provided, see if you understand what you’re reading by solving the problem yourself.
3. Work through the key steps of each theorem. Often times authors omit minor steps (or even major ones). By filling in these gaps as well as writing down the main arguments, you will deepen and improve your understanding of the material.
4. Plan to spend about 30-60 minutes to read each section of the book thoroughly for the first time.
5. Read when you are relatively alert; it’s hard to get much content with one eye closed.
6. Re-read when necessary. And re-read again. Advanced mathematics takes some repetition to master, and it will not always be the case that ideas make sense right away.
7. Talk about the text with other students. A 15-minute discussion with someone else, particularly a challenging proof or concept, will be immensely helpful to both of you.
8. If you’re confused by what the words say, try to draw a picture.
9. When you encounter a new topic that is frustrating you, remember that previous topics were also difficult at first, and don’t forget about the satisfaction that comes in mastering a difficult concept.

I know that you are probably not too excited about reading a math book! However, you may be surprised at how much **more** you will learn from class by reading the basics of the material beforehand. Also, it is **guaranteed** to make our class-time far more efficient. Remember that nothing worth doing or learning comes without some hard work attached.