

Important
Note

Please ask questions early if anything about course policy is unclear. We hope this document is sufficient for you to understand how to engage with the course, but please be aware that: (a) the course structure is new, and likely different than what you're used to, (b) this is a new course, and so details are likely to settle throughout the semester.

The purpose of this document is to serve as the minimal working information you *need* to know how to engage with the course. More information may indeed be helpful, so feel free to ask.

Interactive
Follow-Ups

The primary evaluations in this course will be *interactive follow-ups* to written work you submit. Here is a brief overview of this format.

- **Goal, #1.** Simulate the following real-world interaction: you submit written product for a “client” (boss, interviewer, potential client). The “client” reads the document and has follow-up questions, and asks you these follow-up questions live. Their goal is both: (a) to learn answers to their questions, which may go beyond what's contained in the written product, and (b) evaluate your ability to handle future challenges associated with the product that won't be known until they arise.
- **Goal, #2.** To reiterate, these will ask you questions *not covered in your submitted writeup* (it is a live *follow-up*). The purpose is *not* just to insist that you prove you understand your writeup (although, of course, it is a good idea to understand your submitted writeup if you hope to effectively answer follow-up questions).
- **Format, #1.** Each of the two evaluations (one $\approx$ midterm, one $\approx$ final) will involve a submitted written product that will be evaluated, followed up a live interactive follow-up shortly afterwards (the follow-up will be scheduled well in advance, and last 10-15 minutes).
- **Format, #2.** Each written product will be submitted in teams of 2-3, and the live interactive follow-up will be done individually.

Grading

All evaluations center around a course project. The course project has several graded components due throughout the term. You can also earn “engagement points” (overviewed in the next section).

- Let x denote the number of engagement points earned, which is between 0 and 40. It will be possible to earn > 40 engagement points during the semester, and a typical engaged student should have no problem hitting 40 points, even while missing time due to illness or a short spike in extracurricular demands. Your engagement points will be capped at 40.
- Mid-semester project assessment $(40-0.4x)\%$. (For example, if you have zero engagement points, the mid-semester assessment is 40% of your grade. If you have 40 credits, the mid-semester assessment is 24% of your grade).
- Final project assessment: $(60-0.6x)\%$. (For example, if you have zero engagement points, the final project assessment is 60% of your grade. If you have 40 credits, the final project assessment is 36% of your grade).
- Engagement points: $x\%$. (For example, if you have 0 credits, engagement is 0% of your grade. If you have 40 credits, engagement is 40% of your grade). Everyone's engagement score is $100\% - \text{your grade}$ depends on x only to determine the relative weights.

In other words, the baseline grading scheme is 100% the project components.^a Every engagement point earned takes 1% off the project grade and marks it as completed.^b

^aThe project assessments will be fair, and we intend for it to be possible for a student learning the course's skillset to earn a grade they're happy with by consistently putting in a few hours/week. Put another way, we would be fully comfortable with a grading scheme that is 40% midterm and 60% final. Still, we understand that live assessments are stressful, and so are also offering an opportunity to mitigate this via engagement credits.

^bFor example, if you scored 80% on all project components with no engagement points, your final grade would be 80%. If instead you had 40 credits, your final grade would be $80 \cdot 0.60 + 100 \cdot 0.40 = 88\%$.

Engagement
points

The course project will be evaluated on the raw quality of the project components, and not on the basis of effort, engagement, etc. These evaluations will be rigorous and fair, and we would be comfortable having these evaluations form the entirety of your final grade. That said, we understand that having the entire evaluation be based on a small number of graded components feels stressful due to potential variance, so we also offer the opportunity to offset the variance with engagement points. There is no such thing as “negative engagement” in the sense that you can hurt your grade with poor engagement.

In particular, we will assign “learning assignments” throughout the semester *that we strongly suggest doing in order to learn the course skillset, but that we do not plan to rigorously evaluate*. Completing these assignments will earn you engagement points that impact your grade as noted in the previous section. Below are some examples of learning assignments.

- **In-Precept Quizzes.** Every Precept will begin with a very brief paper-and-pencil quiz to help you self-assess basic understanding of a recent lecture. We will grade the quizzes and give brief feedback, and you’ll earn engagement points based on your grade.^a
- **Coaching Attendance.** Every project team will be assigned a TA as a ‘coach’ (see below for further details). You will earn engagement points per coaching session you attend.
- **End-of-Semester Reflection.** The final assignment for the semester will be a reflection on whether you think you learned the intended skills, and how you think it translated into your project. Completing this will earn engagement points.

Note. We will *not* give “late days” or “accommodation points” for missed engagement assignments, under any circumstances.^b

^aRecall that poor performance on a quiz cannot possibly hurt your grade. You’re allowed to skip the quiz and earn 0 engagement points, but taking a stab and earning something will always be better.

^bThis is because none of the learning assignments are required for your grade. During any week, it’s completely acceptable to miss a quiz or coaching session (provided you give your coach advanced notice, etc.). We will share quiz solutions so that you can still self-assess, but won’t give engagement points for doing so.

Coaching

Every project team will get assigned a TA as a ‘coach’ for the semester. Teams will have the option to meet with their coach 1-1 for 30 minutes each week.^a You are *permitted* to use this meeting for whatever you find most helpful. However, we *strongly suggest using these meetings to receive guidance on your project progress, and working a few hours independently on the project between sessions*.^b

Each week you show up engaged to a coaching meeting, you will accumulate engagement points.^c

^aOr rather, almost every week – there may be few weeks with no meetings.

^bYou’re allowed to use the coaching sessions to help go over the course material, but we strongly suggest doing this at office hours instead. You’re also allowed to use the coaching sessions to work on your project with oversight from your coach (and not work outside of coaching sessions), but this will be insufficient to execute a good project.

^c“Engaged” does not have a formal definition and is pass/fail. If you do anything reasonable, you will pass. If you do something unreasonable, you will not get credit for the meeting. You can use the Marshawn Lynch rule as rough guidance: more engaged than [Marshawn Lynch’s 2015 Super Bowl Media Day interview](#) will earn the engagement points, less engaged will not.

**Policy on
Large
Language
Models**

Recent advancements in large language models (LLMs) motivate explicit policies in some courses.

- During the live portion of the live interactive follow-ups, you are (obviously) not allowed to use LLMs, nor any external tools or resources. We will give you a copy of your written submission, and you will not be allowed to consult anything else.
- For everything else, you are allowed to use LLMs and any other external tools and resources however you like. You still must acknowledge any external tools and resources, and your grade will not depend in any way on what you write in the acknowledgements.^{a b}
- Finally, you must still follow all university policies and common sense. You still may not (for example) pay another student to do your written assignment on your behalf. If you have any questions about what is permitted for your written work, or your prep, please just ask – you will never get in trouble for asking.

^aTo be explicit: if your acknowledgements state “I asked Claude to generate this submission based on the course materials, and I copy/pasted it without reading,” we will grade it identically to an acknowledgement stating “I wrote this myself in a locked room with no Internet.” We want you to submit the best written product you can.

^bTo be explicit: you are also allowed to use LLMs and any other external tools and resources to prepare for the live interactive follow-up – you just must perform the follow-up on your own.

**Important
Note**

This concludes the course policy overview. Please remember: (a) ask questions if anything is unclear, and (b) details are likely to change (and be clearly announced) as the semester settles. We do want the course to feel light, and for you to feel like you’re spending a few hours/week outside of lecture engaging in intellectually stimulating ways (rather than memorizing course policy), but also feel like it’s easiest to get there by clarifying as much as we can up front. The next page is *not* course policy, but just unsolicited advice.

Unsolicited Thoughts

What follows is not related to course policy, but may help you interact with the course better. If you want to chat more about this, it's always OK to ask!

What's up with engagement credits? We fully believe the baseline grading scheme of 40% Midterm, 60% Final is fair, and would be completely comfortable having that as the grading scheme. We also intend to give you adequate feedback during coaching and quizzes so that you feel confident going into the live interactive follow-ups.

However, we also understand you may be used to having your performance on “learning assignments” count towards your grade, and this serving as the primary motivation to stay on track with your own prep. Due to LLMs, it is no longer a sensible policy to have performance on “learning assignments” count towards grades.

How will “learning assignments” help me do better on the live interactive follow-ups? The goal of this course is primarily to teach you skills (especially “consulting math” and “logical reasoning”), applied in real-world problem-solving settings. The live interactive follow-ups will put you in such a setting and evaluate those skills. The quizzes will help you practice “consulting math”, and the coaching sessions will help you apply these skills to your project of choice. Importantly, *this is not a skill you can cram – it just takes time to develop*. An analogy to have in mind might be competitive sports – you can't cram conditioning, and need to steadily condition every week for a competition three months out. There will certainly be aspects specific to the live interactive follow-ups you'll want to touch up closer to the date, but ultimately a steady development of skill development is your best bet.

Will you really give engagement credits if I show up to coaching having done no project work on my own? Yes, but: (a) you must be respectful of the coach's time (i.e. you are honest with them about where you're at, work together to make good use of your time with them anyway, and make a realistic plan to get more out of the session next week), and (b) if the only time you spend on your project is 30 minutes/week with your coach, you won't have a good project. But yes, you will still get your credits.

What's your honest take on the best way to use AI and other tools to optimize my grade for the course? Ultimately, you'll perform best on the interactive follow-ups by learning skills the course intends to teach. So, make sure to spend a few hours each week applying those skills to your project. I currently use AI extensively as a *time-saving tool* – there are a lot of things I know how to do on my own, but AI can do them faster. But, I have so far been extremely unsuccessful at using AI for anything I don't already know how to do – whenever I try, I always find I need to learn how to do the task on my own anyway. So, my honest advice is to *absolutely* use AI for aspects of any written product you submit. But, I would *absolutely* make sure that you find a way to ensure you learn enough that you *could* have written the entire submission on your own – you should never be in a situation where you're not sure why your AI-generated product made one choice over another (and you should really never be in a situation where you're not even sure what your AI-generated product means). You should feel like the submission represents *your* work, in the sense that you can justify every decision made (and also answer deep follow-up questions about it), even if you didn't literally write it. One way to do this might be to (for example) do *some* of the work the “old-fashioned way”, and then offload the rest to AI. That will give you an opportunity to experience the full stack of “doing it on your own”, and recognize the level of confidence you feel in the output, so that you can post-process any AI-generated content and get to the same level of confidence.^a

^aNote: you may very well find that if you need to actually understand your product, it's easier to just write it yourself. I do sometimes feel that way. I currently have some projects where I find AI quite useful, and some projects where I find AI to be maddeningly ineffective and just do it myself. For example, I wrote this entire document myself because I want it to be in my voice and AI doesn't replicate my voice well. But, I asked AI to help reformat it to look cleaner after I finished the text.