Instructions for Biology 180 Practice Exams

An online practice exam will be given most weeks, starting the second week of the quarter; see the syllabus for dates. You will submit written short-answer responses online, then later grade another student’s exam. These exams are “practice” in the sense that questions are similar to midterm exam questions, but on practice exams you will have more time per question and fewer points are at stake, so test anxiety is minimal. Taking the exam and grading both provide opportunities to develop critical-thinking skills and improve your writing.

To prepare for exams: Study as you would for a midterm. Exams will focus on lectures, plus related material from lab and textbook, up to but not including the day of the practice exam. Exams emphasize applying concepts to new situations. Practice exams are open-book, open-note (midterms won’t be!), but books and notes will not help with the type of questions asked: the answers cannot be memorized or found in a reference. You may need a calculator or scratch paper for some practice exams, so have those materials handy.

To take an exam: Choose the “Take a Practice Exam” link on the course website, and log in using the login name and password below. You may start at any time during the exam period; once started, you have 35 minutes to complete the exam for full credit. In response to student complaints, the on-screen timer has been removed; please use your own clock to time yourself. As with any web-based activity, server response times can vary unpredictably, so avoid waiting until the last minute to submit your exam. Points may be deducted for late submissions. Our system does not “take” your answers when time expires; you must actively submit your exam and, the next day, your grading. Please don’t contact us if you submit late, even if by only a few seconds; just submit earlier next week. Practice exams are not Catalyst exercises; the rules for submission are different – read and follow the instructions on the screen.

Login name: biol180
Password: foodweb

Exam period: Tuesday, from 1:00 AM until 11:00 PM.

Work individually, without help from classmates or others. This includes the Discussion Board (GoPost): please do not post practice exam discussions until after the exam grading period has closed.

You will not be able to review your answers after they are submitted. If you wish to save a copy of your answers, copy and paste them into a word processor document or make a screenshot while taking the exam.

To grade an exam: Again choose the Take a Practice Exam link. You will be given an exam to grade, a detailed answer key and a grading rubric. You may start at any time during the grading period; once started, you have 20 minutes to complete grading. Grade conscientiously; someone else’s score depends on it, and you will learn more by carefully comparing the student’s answer with the key. Grading is monitored by course staff; we consider careless grading to be the same as no grading, and will award no credit. Note that only the students who take an exam in any given week can grade an exam that week.

Grading period: Wednesday, from 1:00 AM until 11:00 PM.

Credit: For credit, you must submit your exam and grade another student’s exam. No exam credit if you forget to grade! If you forget to grade within the grading period, you cannot do it later or make it up next week. Scores will be posted on the website; an email message will alert you each time this is done.

Computer problems: To minimize the chance of computer problems, be sure that you have a stable internet connection; hardwired campus computers usually work better than wireless ones. The Biology Study Area, Hck 220, has such connections. In addition, it’s wise to …

• Reboot your computer and open only the browser for taking the exam.
• Turn off automatic features such as software updates that might interrupt your browser session.
• Avoid using the browser’s Back button (or clicking the screen back arrow) at any time while taking or grading a practice exam. Doing so often reloads the webpage, effectively erasing your work.

If you do experience problems with your computer or the practice exam software while taking or grading an exam, email Biology IT manager Dave Hurley right away (dhurl@uw.edu; also linked to the practice exam intro page). Give him your full name, student number, and a description of the problem, including any informational messages on the screen.

We will address problems with the practice exam software, but we cannot fix, and will not adjust your grade because of, problems with your computer, internet connection, or other internet problems. We drop each student’s lowest practice exam score, so one computer problem will not affect your grade.

Content problems: If you think that there is an error in the content of a practice exam, for example, an error in the answer key, please email the professor right away. The professor’s email address is on the course website.

Scoring: Each practice exam is worth 8 points; each question is worth 2 points. If the number of questions is not equal to 4, totals will be scaled up or down to a maximum of 8. For example, on a 3-question exam, your total will be multiplied by 1.33 (6 x 1.33 = 8). Scores will be posted along with other scores for the week; an email message will alert you. If you have questions about your scores, contact John Parks (jwparks@uw.edu).

Some notes about peer grading: We have done research on student grading and have found that on average, student graders are about 25% easier than faculty and TA graders. Because course grading is non-competitive, there is no incentive for graders to grade harshly. Grading is assigned randomly and is anonymous to the student, so even if a grader is unduly harsh, your work will not be graded by that individual again. Grading is monitored by course staff; we will deduct points for graders who are too harsh, too lenient, or careless.

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