# Astronomy 230I: The Science and Fiction of Planetary Systems

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<th>Lecturer: Dr. Alan Peel</th>
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<td>11-12:15pm CSS 2400</td>
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<td>Discussions: M 12,1 or 2pm CSS 2428</td>
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<td>Mailbox: PSC 1113 (9 am - 4 pm)</td>
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<td>Office Location and Hours</td>
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Be sure to log on to the ELMS Canvas website and complete Participation #1 (signing off that you've read the syllabus either here and or the printer friendly file). You must also come by my office and check your name off a list I keep there. Failure to do either of these things will mean a loss of easy points from your participation grade!

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<th>Grade Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Homework Assignments</td>
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This image shows a 1 degree across region of sky (1 degree is roughly the width of your thumb held at arm's length which is also the equivalent of twice the apparent width of the moon from here) where the Hubble Deep Field image was taken: the funny "Tetris"-like shape in the middle. Click on the image for the actual Hubble Deep Field. Nearly all the 3000 or so objects in that little shape are galaxies. How many planets are there in the Universe? We will estimate that, but as you can see, it's a vast number. Now how rare do you think our little blue-green planet is?

Course Description (a.k.a., "Syllabus")

[T]here is an infinite field, a containing space which doth embrace and interpenetrate the whole. In it is an infinity of bodies similar to our own. No one of these more than another is in the centre of the universe, for the universe is infinite and therefore without centre or limit...[T]here are certain determined definite centres, namely, the suns, fiery bodies around which revolve all planets, earths and waters, even as we see the seven wandering planets take their course around our sun....Thus there is not merely one world, one earth, one sun, but as many worlds as we see bright lights around us, which are neither more nor less in one heaven, one space, one containing sphere than is this our world in one containing universe, one space or one heaven.

- Third Dialogue of *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*

Giordano Bruno, 1584
By now, you have probably seen at least one science fiction movie or read one sci-fi story which has raised your suspicions that either the authors/creators had 1) a limited budget to try to create a new planetary environment or 2) a limited imagination. Scientists have collected enough data within our own solar system and recently beyond it to know that a huge variety of planets exist in our Universe, some of which may quite plausibly contain life. But it's a far cry to assume that all that life swims, flies or breathes through a 21% oxygen atmosphere with 75% of the surface covered in liquid water. In
This interdisciplinary course will lay the groundwork for understanding how planets function in stellar systems by examining the plausibility of planets in science fiction. We will also consider the possibility of terraforming other planets, even within our own solar system. To critically investigate fictional environments, we will introduce the necessary general geology, physics, and chemistry to learn how terrestrial and jovian planets and moons form.

We will see multiple examples of imagined worlds, many familiar through popular culture as well as the general science fiction canon. As the semester progresses, you will develop a host of specific analytic skills using what we know about real planets, moons, asteroids, and comets. As a class, we will also critically analyze their discuss how these differences impact the plausibility of new information.

The science fiction canon will be put under a variety of conditions (proximity to their star, chemistry, gravity, stability of rings, crater formation rate, etc.) to see what their histories are like. Analyzing these will help us understand the foundation of our own solar system. To fully understand this, you need to suspend your disbelief only so far and no further.

By the end of this semester, I expect you will no longer have any reasonable fear of science fiction. It involves every fact, it's questionable truth.
of real exoplanets, a better understanding will emerge of how archetypal (or not) our own Solar System actually is.

You will be placed in a five- or six-member group, which will have multiple chances inside and outside the lecture and discussion section to practice this critical examination style via small group assignments ("homework") before embarking on a larger group project during the last half of the semester. Toward the end of the semester, we will discuss the needs and estimate the costs for terraforming various Solar System candidates (Mars, Europa, etc.). In the last two weeks of the class, this new knowledge will be applied in group work by the students to design their own fictional stellar system, including at least one terraformed object.

This course is intended primarily non-majors (i.e., not majoring in Astronomy or Physics). While there are no prerequisites (beyond college algebra) there is no doubt that such previous knowledge will help greatly. We do require the CORE Distributive Studies Requirement in Mathematics. We will use a little bit of mathematics in this course and a lot of physical reasoning. A fair amount of basic astronomy and physics will intrude into class but this is unavoidable if we are to explain how we know what we know.

Grading

(← At this rate, we should be able to jump to the Moon in future movies! Click for article of origin.)

You are STRONGLY encouraged to keep track of your grades using ELMS website as each homework and test gets graded. I grade on a point scale with different weights weighted as shown in this table:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
<th>Homework (5)</th>
<th>Tests (4)</th>
<th>Final Project</th>
<th>P</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POINTS</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>150</td>
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Letter grades will be assigned based upon your cumulative score, and I do not curve lightly. Having taught various classes for over five years (some multiple
times), I have found these grading guidelines below to be about right. I reserve the right to adjust the following based on class averages. However, any adjustment will make it easier to get a given grade, never more difficult. Here is a **rough** guide as to how your points relate to your final grade:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Course Total</th>
<th>900-1000</th>
<th>800-899</th>
<th>680-799</th>
<th>550-679</th>
<th>0-549</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>90%-100%</td>
<td>80%-89.9%</td>
<td>68%-79.9%</td>
<td>55%-67.9%</td>
<td>0%-54.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Grade</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F</td>
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As you can see, missing 100 points of the class participation can drop your grade a whole letter. So **DON'T SKIP THE LECTURES!** Let me know in person or by email as soon as possible if you are planning on missing lectures due to a religious holiday. Letting me know after the holiday will not work.

The point scale makes it possible for everyone in the class to do well. For example, if everyone scores above 80% in the course, you would all receive either a B or better letter grade. Unlikely as it may be, the entire class could potentially get A's. I **will** be using +/- modifiers for the final grade. Past experience has shown that my assignments and tests are pitched about right, to where the average total score in the class is in the 80% range of points, the B/B- range.

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**Class Participation**

*(or "Why did you have me buy this silly clicker?")*

The text is "required" as well as a Turning Technologies response device (either the new RF LCD clickers which I recommend shown on the left, or the old RF clicker shown on the right; the XR (not shown) also works but is horribly user unfriendly) or ResponseWare license for your smartphone/tablet. Be warned that laptops are not allowed in class (see **below**) unless specifically dictated by a DSS form. This class has lots of students; each of you brings your (sometimes unique) perspective and it is often worth sharing your insights (right or wrong!) with your neighbors and classmates. Learning is usually far more effective when you try to persuade your neighbors and yourself using your comprehension. I use the clickers nearly daily; your responses give me immediate insight into how well the material is understood and by how many students. This informs my lecture on the spot, allowing me to go over difficult material sufficiently and to move on only when I deem that comprehension has become universal. You WILL NOT BE graded on your clicker responses, only docked points if you fail to respond.

Within a few weeks, I will actually know many of your names and faces (and even occasionally
both at the same time!). In order for you to succeed in this course, I expect you to try to attend all lectures. This is very important! The homework assignments, tests and final are based upon the material covered in the lectures and text. The very few people that have ever earned bad grades from me had (not coincidentally) also had terrible attendance. The lectures are punctuated with in-class exercises and discussions with your neighbors which most students find very helpful in reaching comprehension of the material. That said, the official University policy on how to deal with excused absences can be found here. Note the required advanced warning to the instructor if you plan on missing class due to religious observances!

If you do have to miss a lecture be sure to look at another student's notes and make sure that you understand what was covered or come to office hours. Essentially, you should assume that EVERY LECTURE during the semester will include a variety of group discussion questions and clicker questions and while your responses don't have to be initially correct, you often have to answer them using your clicker. Within the first few weeks only, you may let me know that you are there after class to avoid losing participation points.

This participatory aspect of the lecture will be worth points, and part of the 10% of your overall grade (see above table). With that said, please see me (in advance whenever possible) if you plan on missing lecture(s) for any reasons, including religious holidays so that your grade will not suffer.

The first bit of participation grade involves:

1. finish reading this syllabus page, either here online or the "printer friendly" pdf file linked in the header;
2. going online to the ELMS site for this class and electronically "signing" that you've read the syllabus in "Participation #1";
3. AND dropping by my office to check your name off a list. (Then I know that you know where my office is!)

NOTE: Failure to sign the syllabus acknowledgement or drop by my office to check your name off means you will lose EASY points off of your participation grade!

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Discussion Section
Discussion section serves as a very useful extension of the interactive part of the lectures. Group memberships were chosen based on discussion section so you will continue to work in your groups there.

With the help of the professor or the TA, you will work through examples and arguments regarding planets imagined by us or in the Science Fiction canon. This weekly exercise will prepare you for the homework questions, tests and eventually, your final project.

The discussion section part of the class is required (and HIGHLY recommended!). It's here that you want to iron out misunderstandings and get your intuition lined up with reality (a.k.a., science). For satisfactory participation, full points are easily earned in each discussion section (7 points for twelve sections, plus 8 for two makes 100 points - see Lecture Schedule).

Brrrrr! How many gallons of antifreeze are needed to keep these things going?

Tests
A single midterm is a travesty of assessment; multiple quizzes would serve both you and me better. However, for time considerations there will be only four unit tests (call them midterms if you must, but only one is in the middle of the term). These are closed book with no notes and no calculators allowed (nor, as you'll discover, are they necessary). You'll be given the entire lecture time to take the test.

Each test will consist of short answer questions (true/false, multiple choice, short definition) and a few longer questions. These tests are incremental (i.e., non-cumulative) checkups on how well you have learned the material up to the lectures prior to the related homework. The Lecture Schedule (periodically check for updates!) shows what material will be covered on each test. If, for whatever reason, the University is officially closed on the test date, the test date shifts to the next lecture date.

PLEASE NOTE that many of the questions on the tests will NOT be exactly the same as homework questions but will challenge your comprehension of the material.

In lieu of a final exam, you will present your group's Final Project on the Final Exam date. See that section for more details.

DSS students, see § Disability Accommodation below.

Missed Test Policy
If you are not able to take a test due to a VALID EXCUSE as outlined in the Academic Information section of the schedule of classes and you wish to take a full credit make-up test (which may be considerably harder than the original test and, for example, may consist only of essay questions), you must:

1. contact me by email or phone before you miss the regularly scheduled test if physically possible and
2. submit a valid written excuse for your absence within one week after the regularly-scheduled test (by US Postal mail if necessary!).

There is rarely an excuse for not being able to at least call me and leave a message. For the record, the official University policy on how to deal with absences is here.

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Homework Assignments

There are a total of five (content-related) homeworks in this course. Homework #1 will be online on the ELMS site by the evening of the first day of class. If you have trouble with the first homework, consider it an ominous sign and consult with me as soon as possible! Future homeworks will be also become available on ELMS as the term progresses.

Although you are HEAVILY encouraged to discuss the homework problems with your friends, the final writeup must be in your own words. Copying from a friend's homework, copying from a book without citing, or allowing a friend to copy your homework is academic dishonesty and will not be tolerated in this class, and you may receive an "XF" on your transcript. If you consult a reference other than the course text, including websites, please acknowledge or cite it in your homework! (See § Academic Integrity below.)

Deadline. You must turn in a paper copy of your homework on the due date at the beginning of class sharp. The due dates are listed on the Lecture Schedule.

DO NOT email me your homework under any circumstances. There is no way to turn in late homework; that is what is meant by a "deadline."
Neatness counts. Sloppy handwriting, incomplete reasoning and ragged paper edges are subject to point penalties. Homework which is not stapled properly is subject to a penalty. This isn't high school and we should not be responsible for loose sheets.

Every effort will be made to get your graded homework back to you quickly. However, sometimes the homework closest to a test will not quite get back to you quickly enough to be very useful. Solutions will be posted right after the deadline, and as always I urge you to use the "Discussions" feature on ELMS.

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Final Project

You will be put in groups almost immediately to work on smaller group projects during your discussion section. But, the end goal of the semester is a large project for which the group will share responsibility: design your own stellar system!

You will pick a real, known star in the sky and describe an imaginary planetary system around that star. If we know of any planets there you must include them, but you are not limited to that list only! More details will be given in class, but the grading rubric will be looking for:

- (~20%) basic grammar and spelling
- (~15%) the star's luminosity, mass, temperature and color (with calculations to back that up/confirm any research you've done)
- (~20%) detailed list of the important objects in your stellar system (location, mass, radius (and therefore density), length of year, effective temperature, greenhouse effect) including calculations to back that up
- (~15%) plausible formation theory behind the stellar system structure and distribution
- (~15%) some creativity - note this is naturally in a bit of tension with the previous category! Too dull can be very plausible; too creative might be
incredible in the literal sense!

- (~15%) a terraformed planet (this can be
  broadened to planet engineering for the
  needs of a non-taran species!) with an
  explanation of how it was engineered

**Extra Credit?**

There will be no extra credit.

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**Course Expectations (and Suggestions!)**

Show up! You are expected to try to attend all lectures, and your grade depends (weakly and weekly) on participation.

Pure "lecturing" doesn't actually work that well. The advantages of attending lecture are to interact with students and ask questions: i.e., to be an active participant in your learning, not a passive, "empty vessel" awaiting the brilliant words of the professor to fill your head with knowledge. (Believe me, you'll be waiting a long time if you think that's the case.)

However (and this is where my contribution is priceless), attending lecture will help you gain important clues and caveats, especially if you don't understand the text. Demonstrations can often get an explanation across far better than diagrams or text in a book. And heck, if you do understand everything, you'll have opportunities to share your unique perspective during lecture with the people around you, so be there! (See § Class Participation above for more details.)

All that said, I try to run a fun class and crack jokes (sometimes even good ones) to keep the tension low and your spirits high. Looking over years of course evaluations, most people seem to like the tone of the class, but I have been accused of overt sarcasm and even downright snarkiness. If at some point I say something rude, please either let me know 1) right away or 2) after class or even 3) anonymously by reporting it to the physics department so they can tell me. Berating me on the course evaluation generally leaves me scratching my head (what did I say?), and never really gives me the chance to make amends, apologize or explain.

Laptops are banned (see below) unless specifically dictated by a DSS form, or I specifically ask you to bring them.

**Preparation:** I expect you to be prepared to work. You will get more out of the participation during lecture if you preview the reading assignment (listed in the Lecture Schedule and updated during the semester). You'll also be more aware of what you don't understand and can come to
class with useful questions.

I rarely expect the text to make perfect sense the first time you read it. But reading it beforehand regardless will help the lectures bring it all home. A more careful second reading is recommended after lecture. It is also good to peruse your class notes sometime before the next lecture to make sure that everything is clear. I STRONGLY encourage you to ask questions in class, during office hours, and on the ELMS Discussions for our class. The only dumb question is "Why didn't I ask in class when I had the chance?"

**Study Habits:** A HUGE mistake made by many students (especially frosh?) is to misjudge how much time they need to study outside of class.

*According to time-use surveys analyzed by professors Philip Babcock, at the University of California Santa Barbara, and Mindy Marks, at the University of California Riverside, the average student at a four-year college in 1961 studied about 24 hours a week. Today's average student hits the books for just 14 hours.*

-- *Boston Globe, 4 July 2010*

"So, what?" you ask, "maybe we're more efficient than you old fogies were. We can multitask." Alas, that argument belies itself. Although this Colorado State [weblog](http://www.colorado.edu/library/learning_center/learning_weblog/commonsense.php) focuses on student "multitasking" in class, it's not hard to extrapolate how effective multitasking is in general.

"Ok, you grumpy old man, how many hours should I really be working?" There is a decent rough calculation for how much time you should spend working based on the 20th century idea of a ~40 hour workweek. Multiply the number of credits you're taking by 3. (You'll note that the number of "credits" for a class very roughly corresponds to the number of hours spent in lecture). So a 15 credit semester means you should be working (both inside and outside) class 45 hours/week. (20 credits means 60 hours which is why those kinds of course loads are frowned on!) If you're taking five three credit classes, each class should use up 9 hours/week on average. Obviously, some weeks are heavier than others. Since, for most classes (Tu Th 75 min class'ies or MWF 50 min classes) you're only inside class for 2.5 hours/week (75 min/day x 2 days/week = 50 min/day x 3 days/week = 150 min/week x 1 hr/60 min = 2.5 hours/week), this means you should be spending **about 7 hours a week/class outside the lecture.** That should be a mixture of discussions with colleagues, professors and TAs, wrestling with homework, and, of course, some nose-in-book/laptop reading.

PLEASE ask for help when you need it. If you rely on cramming the night before any test, you are not likely to do well. It is better (and easier) if you keep up with the material on a nearly daily basis. Make it a point to read the chapters in pace with (or even ahead of) the lectures; this is one of the best study habits you can have. If you have questions, please see me in office hours and/or post them on the [ELMS Discussions](http://elms.umd.edu). I troll it frequently to make sure people aren't left hanging endlessly waiting for insight. BUT DO NOT WAIT until the day before an test!

**Discussions!** Usually the best way to understand something (or check that your understanding is correct!) is to try to explain it to someone else. I encourage collaboration (but not plagiarism!) and discussion inside and outside class and online on the [ELMS Discussions](http://elms.umd.edu). I generally "troll" those boards to make sure questions are getting answered, so unless it's to remind me that I
have't trolled in a while, please avoid the temptation to email me directly: if you have a question, chances are a large number of other students have the same question and answering it in the ELMS Discussions is more efficient.

Other Classroom rules: No newspapers, mp3 players, etc. And please turn off all cell phones or risk ridicule by me. In short, show respect to your lecturer (me), your neighbors and yourself.

Further advice: I'm an easy going guy who tends to be sympathetic, but before you come to office hours, please check you're not about to make one of these comments for which I will have no sympathy (courtesy of Dr. Steve Dutch of the University of Wisconsin).

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Laptops (Tablets, etc.)

Unless specifically requested for an in class activity, laptops are banned.

Many of you will want to bring your laptops to class to take notes. Alas, studies have now shown (real data!) that taking notes this way is actually not as good as by hand. You could swear on a stack of your favorite religious texts that you won't multitask (email, Netflix, etc.). Fine. Thanks for that reassurance, but that's actually only one of the issues. And anyway, as this blog points out via peer-reviewed papers, students woefully underreport how much they use their laptops and devices for distraction.

You could then claim that you can take more thorough notes typing than using longhand because you type faster. That's entirely possible, yet it turns out that when you do that you use a different part of your brain which doesn't process what's going on in class as well as it could. You could then say, well, sure, but later when I'm looking at my notes it'll be more helpful if they're more "complete". Here's the surprising thing: wrong again. Here is an easy to read article outlining real research on this issue and here is the link to the actual paper published.* (Click on the photo up right to link to a similar public media article in French.)

To put a final, amusing twist to this, you can't doodle if you use a laptop. Why would that matter? Well, it's now been shown that doodling (within reason) helps your memory and focus. And frankly, since most of my classes are physics and astronomy classes, sketching pictures is MUCH easier on paper and often worth the proverbial thousand words (or numbers, equations, etc.).

I won't ban you from bringing your phone to class, but if it rings out loud, or you're on it constantly, I do reserve the right to tease you in front of everyone.

DSS exclusions obviously apply - please contact me ASAP if you have one.

*Before you accuse me of being unscientific by only citing one paper, the only papers I could find supporting laptop use seemed to conclude that the main benefit was "more thorough" notes...which, as the above more recent study shows, is not the useful measure for retention, test outcomes, etc. For example, this paper. addendum: 8/28/14: Okay, there's this blog in which the author, who discourages but does not prohibit laptops points out this critique of the ban. Let me
know what you think in person.

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Disability Accommodation

Students with a documented disability who require academic accommodations should contact me as soon as possible. If you suspect you might require such in this class or any, please feel free to discuss this with me during office hours, or head straight to the Disability Service Support office for more information.

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Academic Integrity

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the definitions and consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.she.umd.edu/ or go straight to the source.

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Copyright Issues and Your Notes

Selling or distributing copies or modified copies of instructors' course materials or assisting another person or entity in selling or distributing those materials should be considered a violation of the University Code of Student Conduct, Part 9(k). In general, only some of the overhead presentations shown in class will be available on the web. They won't necessarily make a lot of sense by themselves, however, so don't use them in lieu of coming to class! (Besides, then you'd be missing out on easy points - see § Class Participation.) Students may always request a reviewing of them during office hours on a face to face basis.

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Course Evaluations

CourseEvalUM will be open for students to complete their evaluations later in the semester. Students can go directly to the website to complete their evaluations. You will be alerted when the evaluation sites are ready closer to that time via your official University e-mail account.

Students who complete evaluations for all of their courses in the previous semester (excluding summer), can access the posted results via Testudo's CourseEvalUM Reporting link for any course on campus that has at least a 70% response rate. You can find more information, including periodic updates, at the IRPA course evaluation website.
The expectation is that all students will complete these. This is YOUR chance to anonymously evaluate this class: please use this opportunity! I have altered courses before based on constructive criticism from students.

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Don't Ask!

I have been praised to the skies by some students and reviled by others. In the end, it makes no difference to me if you love me or hate me. What matters to me is that you broaden your horizons by learning something new in my class. I also hope that you see how passionate I and my colleagues are about physics and astronomy and I hope you develop an inkling of that passion yourself.

Good professors and lecturers put as much effort into designing a course as good students put in to learning the material in it. And we try our best to avoid bias when it comes time to grading. However, there are a few things you can do to also help triggering any frustration on our part (which, to be utterly honest, can sneak into our perception of your achievements... as unfair as that is). For instance, here are Jorie Scholnik’s Five Things You Should Never Say to Your Professor (USA Today, 10 Jan 2013) along with my snarky answers.

- Did I miss anything important/Did we do anything important in class?
  Yes. Bummer, hunh?
- I just took your class for an easy A.
  Feh, good luck with that!
- I didn't know we had anything due in this course.
  That's why you get a syllabus; and why I make you sign off that you've read it. A syllabus is basically a contract.
- I was busy studying for my other classes so I didn't do my work for this class.
  Manage your time better next time.
- Did you answer my email yet?
  No. As you would know if you read your email. (In other words, don't ask me, just send a nudge email.)

In addition, here are some more things which will not work with me:

- Can I email you my homework? [the default answer is "No"]
- Can I turn in my homework late? [ditto: "No"]
- I have a test in another class today. Can I take your test at an earlier (or later) date? [see above answers]
- I just noticed I haven't gotten participation credit for the last five weeks.
  Well, you should have been on top of that and made sure your clicker was working (if this
class uses a clicker)...or turned in the exit card!

To balance that out, here are some things you absolutely should ask or tell (far in advance, usually) a lecturer or professor:

- **How's your day (week/month/semester) going?**
  Only ask if you want me to ask right back!

- **I didn't understand that; are you saying, "[your interpretation]"?**
  An excellent question when you think you heard something confusing!

- **I still don't get it: can you phrase it another way?**
  I'll try; this is not only acceptable, and advisable, but possibly the hardest for students to ask just when they should. Sure, lecturers may be a little frustrated by your not getting it, but they're usually more appreciative that you're trying! It's also probably important that you "get it" before we move on or you'll be even more lost later!

- **Can I arrange a makeup test because of [very good reason]?**
  Quite possibly if you tell me far enough in advance and for a good reason.

- **How is this relevant?**
  Good one as long as you're not being sarcastic!

- **I can't make regular office hours for this class; can we schedule a separate meeting?**
  [sometimes yes, sometimes no, but a valid question either way]

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