

Bi 8 Grading Policies, Winter term 2016

Bi8 is a course that can be taken for grades or pass/fail. The pass/fail line is between D and F. However, if you are taking this course for option credit in Bi or BE, you may not qualify on the basis of a "D" grade. Grading will be based on multiple assignments: (1) Midterm exam, (2) Final exam, (3) in-class quizzes, (4) four problem sets, (5) two presentations in section, and (6) general participation in discussion and class. The exams and quizzes are closed-book, the problem sets are open-book, and the presentations are to be done by you at the whiteboard without referring to notes.

Grading and Pass/Fail

For those of you who are freshmen, Caltech policy still mandates P/F grades on your final report for this second term. However, we will handle your assignments and grading exactly as though the course were given for standard A, B, C, D, F letter grades for all class members. You will see what your letter grade would be, and how you are doing relative to the others in the class, whether you end up with a P or an F on your transcript. If you want recommendations in the future, we will describe your work in this course using the letter grade you really earned. If you want to master molecular biology for future work, this will let you know what you are aiming for.

The grade will be based on the exams, quizzes, problem sets, presentations, and class participation in lectures and sections. The final will be worth 40% of the grade, the midterm will be worth 20% of the grade, and each quiz and problem set will be worth 6% ($6 \times 6 = 36\%$). The remaining 4% of the grade will come from the presentations ($0-3 \times 2\%$ with super presentations giving a bonus). ALL GRADES ARE SUBJECT TO A POSSIBLE BONUS OF UP TO 5% OF TOTAL POINTS FOR STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE STRONGLY IN CLASS.

There is no pre-set distribution of grades - if all the students in the class do superbly, you could all get A's. However, more normally grades will range from the 50's to the low 90's. People earning less than 50% of points for the term will fail. People who skip two or more of the assignments (including the oral presentations) will also fail automatically. For letter grade equivalents, the grading will be on a curve-adjusted scale, so that exact breakpoints between, e.g., "B+" and "A-" grades or "C+" and "B-" grades will be determined as we go, based on the clustering of scores in the class. This is because we try not to give a full letter grade difference (A- vs. B+, for example) to cumulative scores that differ by less than a point. You will see the histograms that we use for these splits and be able to see how you did compared to the rest of the class. If you are on the margin, the difference-maker can be credit you can earn for class participation throughout the term.

Some people in the course may not need it for their majors and may be taking it for Institute biology credit in place of one of the “Bi1’s” or other courses. Some of these students are upperclassmen. Although the default for upperclassmen is to take Bi8 for grades, we do not require you to take it for grades unless you need it for your major.

Late Work Policy

To be fair, everyone in the class should have the same amount of time to deal with the assignments, and to ensure level standards, we need to be able to grade everyone’s work in parallel. Obviously it’s also important that you have done the work before the answers to the assignments are posted. In general, we will post the answers on line within a week after the due date. Work that is handed in by the deadline will get full credit. Work that is handed in after the deadline, but before the answers are posted will get partial credit, at a deduction of 20% from the original point score per day. Any work that is not handed in until after answers are posted will not be given any credit, except under rare and well-documented circumstances.

Exceptions to late work policy

If you know in advance that one of the deadlines conflicts with an obligation, such as travel to an interview or conference, it’s **your** responsibility to contact the TAs and arrange an alternative due date for your work. If you do this in advance, and then you get your work turned in by the arranged time, you will not be penalized.

If you get sick or have an accident that prevents you medically from finishing your work, you may also be given extra time, but only under these circumstances: you **must get a note from a doctor or registered health professional**. Dean Green can be very helpful as a sounding board for any problems you may have, but she is not a substitute for a doctor. A supportive note from Dean Green can explain the situation, but does **not** protect you from the requirement to give us written evidence that you are really sick. Again, if you are sick you should also talk with the TAs to arrange a new due date for your work, and you need to abide by this.

If you are seriously ill and need to miss/postpone more than two deadlines as a result, you should discuss this situation with the teaching staff for advice. It would probably make sense in that case for you to drop the course and re-take it in a future term when your health is better.