

Thursday Recitation Activities: TA Quick Guide

MA 16100 – Spring 2026

Purpose

Recitation activities are designed to promote **collaborative problem solving, verbal reasoning**, and preparation for **individual quizzes and exams**. Your role is to **facilitate interaction**, not to lecture or simply check answers.

Quick TA Reminders (Read First)

- Facilitate discussion; don't lecture
 - One problem-set per group (3–4 students)
 - Ask questions, not answers
 - Credit = engagement and reasoning
 - Some messiness (especially Weeks 1–3) is normal
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BEFORE RECITATION: TA Preparation

Before recitation, please: - **Solve the activity yourself** - Prepare **3–5 guiding questions** you could ask if students get stuck (questions, not explanations)

This preparation allows you to prompt discussion, redirect groups that are copying or working silently, and keep recitation interactive without turning it into a mini-lecture.

START OF RECITATION: What to Say to Students

At the start of recitation (especially Weeks 1–3), say:

“Recitation activities are collaborative. You should talk through ideas, explain reasoning, and ask each other questions. Everyone should understand the solution, since quizzes and exams are individual.”

“If I see one person doing all the work, or if people are just copying, I'll step in and ask questions.”

On the first activity, also say:

“A quick norm for group work: mistakes are a normal and important part of learning mathematics. Please be respectful when someone makes a mistake—those moments help everyone learn. The goal is to help each other understand, not to be perfect.”

DURING THE ACTIVITY

Group Setup (Very Important)

- One printed activity per **3–4 students**
- Students sit together and **share one paper**
- Encourage informal roles (not strict):
 - **Reader** – reads the problem aloud
 - **Scribe** – writes
 - **Checker** – verifies steps
 - **Explainer** – can explain the solution if asked

If one student is always writing, **ask someone else to take the pencil.**

Your Role as the TA

DO: - Circulate constantly (don't stay with one group too long) - Ask questions instead of giving answers: - “Why does that step work?” - “What rule are you using here?” - “Can someone else explain this?” - Cold-call **non-scribes** to explain steps - Ask predictive questions: - “What should the sign of this derivative be?” - “Does this answer make sense graphically?”

AVOID: - Lecturing to the whole room - Solving problems for students - Letting one student dominate without intervention

Common Recitation Scenarios & What to Do

A. Silent Individual Work

You'll see: Little or no discussion; students working alone.

Try this: - Ask a student to say the first step out loud - “Do you all agree with that approach?” - “Talk through it—you're allowed to discuss.”

B. One Student Does All the Work

You'll see: One student writing; others watching.

Try this: - Ask the pencil-holder to pause - Ask another student to explain the next step - "Let's have someone else write this one."

C. Group Divides the Problems

You'll see: Each student solving a different problem independently.

Why this is an issue: - Little discussion - Minimal shared understanding - Encourages copying later

Try this: - "For this activity, work together on each problem rather than dividing them up." - Ask one student to explain another person's solution - Ask the group to agree on each step before moving on

D. Late Arrivals

Recitation activities are graded based on **participation**.

- Students who arrive too late to meaningfully engage may receive reduced or no credit
 - Do **not** take formal attendance
 - Use your judgment based on participation
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E. Early Finishing and Leaving

- Early finishers should remain until near the end of recitation
 - They should be prepared to explain their reasoning if asked
 - Leaving a few minutes early is acceptable at your discretion once work is reviewed
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F. Off-Topic Conversation

Some social conversation is normal.

If progress stalls: - "What's the next step you're working on?" - "You've got about 15 minutes left—what's your plan?"

Avoid scolding; focus on redirecting toward progress.

G. Respectful Collaboration

Mistakes are an expected and valuable part of learning mathematics.

- Encourage constructive, respectful discussion
 - If dismissive comments arise, gently redirect the group
 - Address repeated issues privately when needed
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AFTER THE ACTIVITY: Grading Philosophy

Activities are graded on **engagement and reasoning**, not just correctness.

- **Full credit:** clear attempt, reasoning shown, evidence of collaboration
- **Mostly credit:** incomplete but engaged
- **Reduced credit:** minimal work or lack of participation

You may reduce credit if a group clearly did not engage. If a student arrived 25 minutes late for a 50 minute recitation, it is reasonable to halve their score.

Timing Template (Typical 50-minute Recitation)

- **First 5 minutes:** distribute activity, remind expectations
 - **Next 35 minutes:** circulate and facilitate discussion
 - **Final 5 minutes:** brief wrap-up or highlight a common issue
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Final Notes

- The first 2–3 weeks may feel messy—this is normal
- Consistent expectations lead to big improvements
- Managing group dynamics is part of your role
- If something feels off, communicate with Dr. Hood early

Thank you for helping make recitation productive and collaborative!