Grading Policies
CMSC 471 – Fall 2004 – Prof. desJardins

Policy on Solution Keys: Solution keys are for your personal use only, and are to be destroyed after you review them. In particular, you may not give solution keys to students in other classes, or who take this class in future years.

Academic Honesty: All students are responsible for reading and following the academic honesty policy on the course website.

Late Policy: All students are responsible for reading and understanding the late policy on the course website.

1 Grading of Programming Assignments

This is an approximate distribution of how your grade will be allocated on programming assignments. The specific percentages may vary some from one assignment to another.

• A correct solution (i.e., one that returns the right answer in all cases) will receive 80% credit. Note that you must have complete error checking to receive this credit.

• A readable solution (i.e., one that is commented with a header comment, documentation line, and/or inline comments as appropriate, and properly indented) will receive another 10%.

• An elegant solution (i.e., one that is simple, clean, efficient, and understandable) will receive another 10%.

1.1 Regarding Correctness

No matter what arguments you pass in, your solution should not break. You may either return an error code, return a default value, or use error or cerror to signal an error and enter a break level. In any case, the error action should be clearly documented.

1.2 Regarding Readability

In solution keys, I will typically provide header comments, a documentation line, some inline comments, and properly indented code. This is perhaps more commenting than a simple program needs, but it’s a good habit to get into anyway.

When you start to write longer programs, with many functions, (especially if the functions are small), rather than a detailed header comment for each function, you may want to group the functions together by category, including a header comment for each category.

Please think carefully about how to organize and document your code so that it is readable. Developing software is about more than just getting the right answer: it’s about writing code that is understandable, extensible, maintainable, and modifiable by yourself and by others who may use your code after you.

1.3 Regarding Elegance

Solutions that are inefficient, take many more lines of code than necessary, or use lots of temporary variables when just a few would do, are not as easy to understand or maintain as elegant
solutions. On the other hand, elegance doesn’t just mean “short functions,” since making func-
tions very short may also make them obscure and difficult to understand. Elegance in program-
ming is an art; the only way you can learn it is to think carefully about how you formulate your
solutions, and to study examples of well designed code.

1.4 Regarding Submissions

We reserve the right to run your homework assignments on previously unseen test cases, so you
should be sure that (a) you use the function names that are given in the homework, and (b) you
ensure that your code works on unseen cases, not just the test cases we ask for in the script.

2 Grading of Written Assignments

Some of the written assignments will have a “right” answer. Those will be graded according
to correctness, with partial credit given for incorrect solutions to the extent that you’ve shown
your work and indicated why you believe your answer to be correct. All answers should include
a clear justification: a correct final answer with no explanation of how the answer was obtained
will only receive partial credit.

Other assignments will require you to express opinions in short answers or in essays. As with
programming assignments, a portion of your grade will be given for the content of the essay,
and a portion will be given for readability and style. As with programming assignments, the
approximate distribution of credit will be as follows:

- 80% for content (well thought out and well reasoned answers; answers that are “correct”
to the extent that there is a correct answer, which there often is not).
- 10% for “readability”: correct grammar and spelling, readable formatting.
- 10% for “elegance”: well expressed thoughts in a well structured essay.

Although this is not a writing class, success in any scientific discipline requires the ability
to effectively communicate one’s thoughts. If you have difficulty writing, whether it’s because
English is not your first language, or because you haven’t taken many writing classes in your
undergraduate program, I highly suggest that you take advantage of UMBC’s writing center, in
the main library. (Phone: 455-3126. URL: http://www.umbc.edu/lrc/writing_center.htm.
Hours: Monday – Wednesday, 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Friday, 10 a.m. – 2
p.m.) This is a free tutoring service that will help you prepare essays and papers for any course.