FAQ on Entering Answers in WeBWorK

1. I know I have the right answer, but WeBWorK is marking it wrong because it expects the answer to be written in a particular way.

   This is not true. If the correct answer is $2x$, WeBWorK takes your answer and compares it to $2x$ at several random values of $x$. So if you had left your answer as
   
   $\{\text{abs}\}(-4)\frac{12x}{24}$ or $(\sqrt{2})^2 (x^{\frac{1}{3}})^3$ or $(1+(\frac{1}{2}))x + 2*(\frac{1}{4})x$

   each of these answers would have been accepted as correct by WeBWorK since they each give the same number as does $2x$ when evaluated at different (random) values of $x$.

   There are some things that WeBWorK will not allow, but in each case you will get an immediate message from WeBWorK telling you this. For example, the answer $2.0 \times$ is not allowed since decimal numbers are forbidden (except in some word problems). WeBWorK may also complain if you leave your answer as $-2x \cos(\pi)$ because we think you should know the trig functions of the standard angles.

2. I entered the right answer 30 minutes ago, and only now is WeBWorK accepting that answer as correct!

   It’s time for a reality check. If you really believe this to be true, ask your professor or TA to hit the Show Past Answers button at the bottom of their WeBWorK problem page for you. A list of all your past answers will be shown. You will find that, possibly just due to a typo or misunderstanding about how to enter mathematical answers, you did not enter the right answer 30 minutes ago!

3. It takes much longer to do WeBWorK than it does to do standard homework!

   Well, yes, when you do standard homework you assume that whatever you write down is correct. So you write it down, and you’re finished. The problem is that you may have just “learned” how to do a problem incorrectly! If your answer is wrong, WeBWorK tells you immediately so that you will know that you don’t understand something long before a similar problem appears on an exam.

   One additional comment, however. If you’re finding that it takes you an exceptionally long time to finish problems, you may be just guessing at the correct answers! Your TA or professor is able to view all of your past answers and sometimes sees a list of answers like the following:

   \begin{align*}
   \cos(\pi \times) \\
   \cos(2 \pi \times) \\
   \sin(\pi \times) \\
   \sin(2 \pi \times) \quad &\ldots
   \end{align*}
The student giving these answers is most likely guessing at the answer, not working the problem! And yes, this takes much longer to do than to sit down with a piece of paper to work out the problem carefully.

If WeBWorK tells you that your first attempted answer is incorrect and you cannot see why, don’t start guessing! (How often has guessing helped you on an exam?) Instead, post a question to the WeBWorK discussion forum, go to your recitation and ask your TA, go to the Math Learning Center, ask someone else in your class, ask your instructor after class, etc..

4. It takes forever to type the answer in the answer blank!

You should try to simplify your answer by hand first before entering it into WeBWorK. For example,

\[
\frac{\frac{1}{x} \left( \cos^2(2x) + 3 + \sin^2(3x) \right)}{\frac{5}{\sin x} x^4} = \frac{4\sin x}{5x^6}
\]

and it’s much easier to type in the second answer than the first. Note: WeBWorK will still accept the first answer, but you’re much more likely to make typos along the way.

5. I’ve been told that the correct answer is \( \cos 2x \), yet when I enter \( \cos 2x \), WeBWorK says the answer is incorrect.

Look at the Preview Window that WeBWorK shows you every time you submit an answer! If you did this, you’d see that WeBWorK was interpreting your answer as \( \cos(2)*x \) instead of \( \cos(2x) \) (which is what you should have entered).

If you’re having these kinds of problems, go back to the Learning WeBWorK Tutorial and review the precedence of arithmetic operations and how functions are handled in WeBWorK. There you’ll see, for example, that

\[
2/3x \text{ means } (2/3)x, \text{ not } 2/(3x)
\]

as you may have intended. (Note: this last example is not just a WeBWorK quirk. The first answer would not be accepted as 100% correct on an exam either.)

When in doubt, use parentheses!