

An Essay on Submitting Reconsideration Requests

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Definition: You are *requesting* that a faculty member *reconsider* your answer to a specific question(s) based upon additional documentation or explanation. Therefore, these are neither *challenges* nor *contesting* of the question; they are reconsideration *requests!*

The Approach: Since these are *requests for re-grade*, not *challenges*, it would be in your best interests to start your email professionally and with courtesy, for example:

- “I am submitting question #3 for reconsideration based upon...Thanks you for your consideration.” -or-
- “I am writing to ask that you reconsider my answer for question #3 based upon...” -but not-
- “I thought this was a dumb question!” -or-
- “I am contesting question #3. I felt that this question was not testing our knowledge of the material but our ability to memorize odd facts. I studied extremely hard for this exam and felt like I knew the material, but I did not memorize how many amino acids were in each hormone.” [anonymous quote, 2003]

The Justification: As indicated in the first-day handout, any submission for reconsideration needs to include appropriate, written justification to support your request. This could include your interpretation of the material and/or information from the textbook, primary references, the faculty member’s handout, etc.

1. If you believe there is a discrepancy between what two faculty members present in class (or differences between classes), this would obviously come up when the information is presented in class or when you are studying. Therefore, your concerns or confusion should be ironed out with the faculty *before* the test, *not* used as a post exam justification.

It may be that two faculty members are presenting information differently for a reason. For example, the clinician may stress that Pen G is not useful against *Staph*. From a clinical standpoint, since the *vast* majority of *Staph* strains are resistant to Pen G, then this is a very reasonable summary statement. The medicinal chemist/pharmacologist may stress that 95% are resistant, but 5% are still sensitive during the discussion of resistance development over time, *specifically* to *emphasize* where we’re at in the development of penicillin resistance with this organism. *Both* of these perspectives are clearly valid in the context of what is being taught, and are not contradictory statements.

2. Rarely will you be successful in using old exams as your justification.

- “This question was very similar to question #17 from the 1999 exam, and the answer was ‘D’ (which is what I put).” [anonymous quote, 2003]

It could be that the question on the previous exam was thrown out because of poor statistics, and so the old exam copy you have has a ‘wrong’ answer for which all students were given credit. That doesn’t make it correct. This is one reason why in Pharmacotherapy IIa-IIc, we post previous exams in an ‘unanswered’ form (for you to use for self-evaluation) and then post the keys separately.

In relying on old exams, you should also understand that the information may have changed! Consider the following question:

- “*Strains of Staphylococcus have emerged which are clinically resistant to vancomycin.*”

On the 2001 exam, this statement was *false*; on the 2002 exam it was *true*. Clearly, therapeutic guidelines change as well, which may make old exam questions equivocal or simply incorrect.

3. You may want to have a colleague read your statement for feedback before you submit it for faculty consideration. Examples:

- “*In lecture, you said that side-effects included agranulocytosis, thrombocytopenia, hypoprothrombinemia, and aplastic anemia. But on the test you said blood dyscrasias so I marked it false! You never once mentioned blood dyscrasias!* [anonymous quote, 2003]
- “*You said ‘drug of choice’ in the question, but you didn’t ask which one is primarily the best, so I thought any drug on the list used for treatment was appropriate.*” [anonymous quote, 2003]
- “*On slide 17 you said ‘most hormones circulate in the blood, coming into contact with essentially all cells,’ but on the test you said ‘most hormones come into contact with all cells.’ Since the question didn’t say anything about blood, I marked it false.*” [anonymous quote, 2003]

This is an interesting one. Can you imagine the uproar if this was reversed; i.e., if the faculty member counted this *wrong* for those students who marked it *true* simply because in lecture he mentioned *via the blood*, whereas on the exam, he didn’t mention blood? *The big picture* issue here is that selectivity in hormonal response is not based on cell exposure since essentially all cells are exposed to the hormone via the blood. Rather, selectivity is based on cell-specific recognition of the hormone. Apparently, the student missed this important concept.

4. Never, never, never use as your justification “I need the points”.

The decision on a reconsideration request belongs to the faculty member authoring the question, but all Course Coordinators caution their faculty to *not* consider this “justification” *in any way* in their deliberations. This is *never* an appropriate justification for awarding points, and it simply isn’t fair to the other students to make it a basis for awarding points. Should a student 1-pt from a “C” be given the points for a “B” *just because they asked for them*, while another student with the same score be assigned (and accept) a “C”? What is that faculty member to do when the second student finds out the first was awarded the points just for asking?

5. Just because you can find an article supporting your position doesn’t *automatically* mean that it is correct or that you should be given credit.

Part of the faculty member’s responsibility is to stay current with their field, which involves reading, reviewing, and distilling the often-time copious & conflicting material relevant to their field to create their learning environment and define the content they present to you in class. The faculty member will make their decision on the article/text you cite in the context of their full knowledge of the field and what they present to you in class.

6. If you feel that your reconsideration request has not been fairly considered, you have the right to appeal the decision to the Course Coordinator (consistent with the College Grievance Policy in your Student Handbook). However, you need to *fully justify* your appeal, not just forward a message to the Course Coordinator that “*You have all the emails I sent, and as you can see, the Professor did not give me the points.*”

Conclusion: Not all courses allow for the submission of reconsideration requests; the decision as to whether to do so rests with the faculty. Clearly, if this is allowed, the faculty are committed to fully and fairly assessing your submission prior to making a decision based on the information you provide. Therefore, your submission should be well thought-out and presented in a professional manner, *and you have every right to expect* the faculty member to respond in a like manner.