

Improving Your UW Math Placement Exam Results

In addition to the practice materials available on the UWM placement testing website, there is an online option you can use to refresh your math skills if you would like to study on your own before retesting. The online system is called ALEKS.

ALEKS is the online homework system we use at UWM in our lower level math courses, and anyone can buy a license for ALEKS and work on the basic material on your own. In fact, ALEKS is the program our summer bridge students utilize to practice before retaking the math placement test. The majority of students place higher after working in ALEKS. Purchasing a license to work in ALEKS is a great option for anyone who isn't happy with their UW math placement test results or the way their prior math courses transferred here. Students can take the placement test a total of two times without special permission from the math department.

To begin this program, visit www.aleks.com. There is a tab for 'Independent use and homeschool'; no affiliation with our university is necessary. They offer a free trial (for 3 hours) for you to see how ALEKS works. You can utilize both the parent ('teacher') account and the student ('learner') account. Prior to signing up, look at the 'Course Products', specifically the Higher Education math products.

Here is how these 'course products' line up with UWM courses:

- 'Basic Math' plus 'Beginning Algebra' together cover our Math 094 course. Math 094 is our one and only math course that has no prerequisite. It's roughly grades 1 through 9 math.
- 'Beginning Algebra' by itself is our Math 098 course. Students who demonstrate proficiency in basic math don't have to take Math 094, they can take Math 098 instead.
- **If a student wants to place into credit-bearing math at UWM, they need to demonstrate mastery of both 'Basic Math' and 'Beginning Algebra' on the placement test.** You should work through those two course products in Aleks: first Basic Math, then Beginning Algebra.
- If a student does that and wants to keep going, the next course product to work in is 'Intermediate Algebra'. This is the same as our Math 105 (which is also basically the same as Math 108). So if a student masters the 'Intermediate Algebra' in ALEKS, they should be able to place out of the first college-credit course and satisfy their math GER part A requirement.
- Finally, there's 'College Algebra and Trigonometry', which is our Math 116 (college algebra) and 117 (trigonometry). Students who master that material can place directly into Math 231, our first calculus course. That's the highest ALEKS can get you.

You may be wondering how much time it will take you to do all those courses in ALEKS! In any course product, when you start, you take a pre-test (they call it an 'Initial Knowledge Check'). Any questions you get right; you get credit as already knowing. So don't look the answers up, since that will negate this as a learning tool! After this pretest, ALEKS guides you through learning the rest of the topics at your own pace. You can probably do at least the Basic Math one quickly if you're comfortable with middle school math. ALEKS provides brief explanations for each question type, but you can also find lots of free high school math books online or in your local library to use as a reference.

You buy a license for a certain number of weeks. 18 weeks is what our semester students do. The cost is approximately \$80. You can use it as much or as little as you want in the 18 weeks. Once you finish one course product, it will let you move on to a new course product.

To prepare for retaking the math placement test, remember our placement test requires you to memorize all the math formulas (no 'cheat sheets') and graphing calculators are not allowed (only scientific). When working in ALEKS, only use the ALEKS calculator when it's available. When you're working in ALEKS, it will occasionally give you 'assessments' or 'knowledge checks'. These are like pop quizzes. You should try to do them without looking at your notes and only use the calculator in ALEKS when it is provided. To ensure that you have actually learned the material to the level expected on our placement test, do not use the internet or other areas to get for the answers for the assessments.