PLEASE READ THIS MATERIAL THOROUGHLY:

First off, ALEKS is not like most homework systems. You don't earn points for "getting answers right", you earn points based on how much you complete. Depending on your preparation and how much effort you put into reading ahead of attempting homework, you will get more or less problems assigned to you. Your homework will be tailored to meet your needs, thus it will be very different from everyone of your fellow students.

Secondly, you need to keep up with your work on ALEKS! If you procrastinate you will fall behind and not only lose credit, but undoubtedly perform poorly on exams and quizzes. As I will explain below, half of your homework grade will come from keeping up and the other half from how many topics you master. The amount of work you will be assigned depends on the amount of work you need to do.

Last semester, your peers averaged 4.7 ± 2.3 hours per week working in ALEKS. That is really not that much when you consider that this is a 5 unit course! 84% of that group agreed that working in ALEKS helped them effectively learn the course material and over 70% them stated that they “wished they had spent more time working problems in ALEKS”.

As you can see, your grade in the class is directly related to the effort you put into your homework.

Students that earned a “C” or better in the course last semester earned an average of 85% of the total homework points while those earning a “C-“ or worse only averaged 64% of the total homework points.

That means that the effort you put into homework is directly related to the grade you earn in the course!

Conclusion: The points you earn from doing homework are less important that doing the homework!

How ALEKS works:

ALEKS works in a regular cycle of assessment, learning & reassessment. Here's how it will go:

You'll begin with an initial placement assessment, about 20-30 problems and questions in chemistry to solve. You'll get no help at all, nor should you try to find any. The idea is to find out where you should start learning, and you want ALEKS to get that just right. If your friend helps you, or you Google answers, you will end up with learning path that is too advanced and frustrating for your level of preparation. You will miss important prerequisites and end up lost or having to do a lot of remedial work down the line. Conversely, if you don't take the assessment seriously, you'll just end up wasting time on material you already know. The assessment is over the entire chem. 1A course material, so you can expect to get problems you have no idea how to solve. Don't worry about that. This is a placement test, not a final exam. You're not going to be graded on it, and there's no reward for doing better or penalty for doing worse.
It is also very important that you complete this in initial assessment before classes begin. If you wait until the end of the first week to do this, you will have a bunch of work to complete by the beginning of the second week. Failure to do so will result in you getting behind and a loss of homework points.

Prep for Chem. 1A: you’ll be expected to come into Chem. 1A with genuine mastery of a wide range of topics from High School (makes sense, right?). Your first objective is to find out which topics you really never mastered, or have forgotten through lack of recent practice, and to recover them prior to the deadline for the first objective, called “Prep for Chem. 1A”. Look in your Gradebook in the ALEKS learning mode to see your score, and make sure that is 100 percent prior to September 4th.

The ALEKS “PIE”:
Each week or so you will have an “Objective” to complete. These assignments consists of a series of topics chosen from you textbook that coincide with material presented in lecture, discussion and lab. (see the course syllabus). Before you attempt these problems you will need to have read through the assigned material. Failure to do so will result in extra work!
As you master each topic, you will begin to fill in your ALEKS “pie”. The pie consists of 224 topics broken up into a series of categories.

Learning Mode: Here you will to learn how to master topics ALEKS determined that you need to work on. Do you see topics here you’re really sure you already know? See the discussion above! Almost certainly, you really DO need to work on those topics, to cement your mastery. You DO NOT want to find that out on the first exam! Trust ALEKS. Do the work it assigns.

Do not procrastinate! If you put off your ALEKS homework until the last possible moment you will not finish in time to earn credit for keeping up with the weekly objectives, and... you will still need to complete the missed topics before you are allowed to move on to new material.

In Learning Mode you master topics by working through problems. Each topic will consist of several problems in the same topic that you must answer correctly for ALEKS to conclude you’ve mastered the topic. How many you need to do will vary depending on the type of mistakes you make, if any. The fastest way to be awarded credit is to be methodical and careful. Get three or four in a row correct and you'll be done. Get one right, then one wrong, then another two right, then one wrong, and you could be there a long time. ALEKS puts a real premium on solving a problem perfectly. All units must be correct and complete. Answers must be rounded to the correct number of significant figures. Nomenclature spelled correctly and formulas must all be written without a single small careless error. This is not to say you can't make mistakes in ALEKS. ALEKS can detect a wide range of mistakes and give you useful feedback to correct your errors. You will certainly move through the system faster if you are careful, so take the time to write out your work on paper thoroughly without skipping steps while showing all of your units. You’ll be rewarded by not having to repeat problems. When it comes to ALEKS, don't think in terms of how many you get right or wrong, think in terms of how much must I do to really learn the material. As you master the topics you will begin to fill in your “pie”. You will only be allowed to work on topics that ALEKS says you are ready to learn. If you finish your objective early then you can enter “open pie mode” which allows you begin working on topics in the next objective or topics that have been re-added to your pie based on an assessment (see below).
In Learning Mode you'll also have access to learning resources. You can ask ALEKS to show you how to solve any problem you’re given, in every detail. (ALEKS will then ask you to solve another, similar but not identical, problem on your own.) There are hyperlinks in these Explanations that will take you to the ALEKSPaedia, a built-in "encyclopedia" of general chemistry that has more general and background knowledge you may need. The Explanation will also tell you where in your textbook you can find more help. Use these resources! They're designed to give you just the right help you need at just the right moment, without wasting your time.

**Assessment Mode:** Finally, after each round of learning, you'll be reassessed (“every two weeks), to make sure you retained what you learned. You're not going to like this, of course. Nobody does. But being reassessed is very important for your long-term success. First, because you really do want to be sure you haven't forgotten anything. But also because practicing solving problems on your own, without any help or hints, cements knowledge and mastery in your memory. Research in cognitive science clearly supports this. You may understand it already from your own experience: You may "feel" that you know something, but if you perform poorly on an exam, you find out that you clearly don’t.

An unfortunate but absolutely necessary aspect of this re-assessment is that you can lose credit for topics which you have forgotten. If this happens -- or rather WHEN it happens, since it will almost certainly happen to all of you, and more than once – topics will be added back into your “pie” that you will need to rework Learning Mode to regain credit. That's more work, of course, so the lesson here is: Learn topics thoroughly the first time through so you can demonstrate your mastery of them any time, on any re-assessment, for the rest of the course. If you ever feel that you are weak on a particular topic, ALEKS also has a Review feature where you can practice on topics where you feel a little shaky. In fact, ALEKS will even suggest which topics you should review, based on its data and your own record. A judicious use of the Review feature will make it much less likely you have to re-study many topics and help you to be better prepared for exams.

**Grading Your Work In ALEKS:** Your ALEKS homework is worth 100 points (10% of your grade). This means that HW will not take an average of 60% on your exams and quizzes from a D to a C, but it will mean that if you earn 70% and above on those exams and quizzes, you will likely earn at least a C or maybe better.

Each week or so you will have an “Objective” to complete. This assignment consists of a series of topics chosen from you textbook that coincide with material presented in lecture, discussion and lab. (see the course syllabus). As you master each topic, you will begin to fill in your ALEKS “pie”. The pie consists of 224 topics broken up into a series of categories. *(see above)* If you master all of the topics in an objective before the due date, you will receive 100% of the objective credit for that assignment.

After each exam and at the end of the semester, your HW points will be based on two factors. (1) How well you kept up with the weekly objectives and (2) your completion of the "pie" (% of topics mastered). This means if you fall behind, you can make up some points by completing your pie.

The purpose of the objective due dates is to keep you working regularly. We know it's human nature to procrastinate if given the chance. If you work regularly, you will likely keep up with the topics in your pie and likely do better on exams and quizzes. Keep in mind that your % of the points is directly related keeping up. If you put off doing homework until the last minute, you will not finish and lose points!

What happens when topics are added back into your “pie”? Well, if you finish an objective early (before the due date) you enter what is known as "open pie". This means that you can go back and fill in any missing topics in your "pie" and even work ahead on topics that ALEKS deems you prepared to attempt! So, it pays to start your homework as early as possible so that you can (1) maximize your homework score & (2) get ahead so that you have time for your other classes!
Always keep in mind that ALEKS will prevent you from working on topics that you are not ready to learn. If you get behind, you will miss out on problems that you need for an exam and you will still need to complete those topics at some point for homework credit.

Here is an example of a student that fell behind on the assigned homework. Because this student failed to complete topics early on in the course, they were prohibited from working on the more advanced material later. Subsequently, they failed the 2nd and 3rd exams and earned a “D” on the final exam and overall grade in the course.

**Final mastery:** Always remember that 50% of your homework points will be determined just by your overall level of mastery at each exam and at the end of the course. (i.e. how many topics ALEKS says you've mastered) The purpose of this is, first, to give you credit for mastery whenever it is achieved, even if its achieved well after the initial deadline. It is also to give you a strong motive for restoring topics to your mastery list that you may lose on reassessment. We don't want you forgetting what you learned in week 1 by the time you get to week 15. That would result in a sad experience on the final exam. Look at the numerator on the fraction above the ALEKS pie for your score here.

**Tips And Tricks.**
Don't cram your ALEKS work into one giant all-night session right before the deadline. Not just because it isn't good for you in the long term. It won't work well even in the short term! What happens is that after about an hour and a half you're going to get tired, and you're going to start making mistakes. What happens then? ALEKS gives you more work to do! Because it looks like your mastery is fading. If you work in marathon sessions, you can easily end up putting in twice as many total hours as someone who breaks his work up into shorter, more frequent sessions, so that he has a well-rested mind throughout. Log in every day and do at least a little work, 30 to 90 minutes is best.

Try to solve each new problem yourself before reading the Explanation. You may get it completely wrong, but by trying to solve it yourself, you will be much more aware of what exactly is confusing to you -- which steps or concepts. Then when you do read the Explanation, it will have much more impact.

When you work on a new topic in Learning Mode, ALEKS will tell you how many more problems you need to get right to earn credit. The best way to long-term mastery is to NOT to work on one topic only until you get credit. Instead, stop just short, when ALEKS says you only need one more correct to gain credit. Go do something else then. Work on another topic, or work on some other course, or do something productive (read a book, get some sleep, wash clothes, work out etc... Then come back later and finish off the topic. Why? Cognitive science tells us memory actually needs a little time when it's not being actively used to become "consolidated" and permanent. Putting a little delay between the bulk of your learning and the final dash to the finish line will significantly improve your retention.

**Always remember:** ALEKS is ALL about retention. You are GOING to see that type of problem again, on an reassessment later on, and you want to get it right every time so you don't have to re-study the topic.

Lastly, always keep in mind that your ALEKS homework will be different from that of every one of your classmates so don't bother comparing answers. Also, don't waste your time searching for answers, you won't find any on the Google internets!
So ALEKS Screwed Up:

DO NOT SPAZ OUT AND EMAIL DR. MACK OR YOUR TA!!!

You’re working in ALEKS, and you are absolutely certain that ALEKS is wrong about your answer. You put the right answer in, and the system marked you wrong. This is deeply frustrating, particularly right before a deadline. Don’t smash your computer. That would be expensive. Also don’t e-mail your instructor in a rage. If ALEKS has really made a mistake, there’s nothing he can do about it, because he doesn't have access to the computers running ALEKS. What you need to do is write to ALEKS Customer Support. Open your Message Center, compose a message to ALEKS Customer Support. You can use as many bad words as you like, but please be as precise as possible about your difficulty, including the date and time, your ALEKS login, and what exactly happened, so that they can zero in on the problem quickly. Check the little box at the bottom of the form that attaches the page on which you were working, for even faster results.

Your complaint will be reviewed promptly by ALEKS. People with PhDs in chemistry will look into it. If you have discovered a genuine bug in ALEKS it will be fixed pronto, usually within 12 to 24 hours, depending on when you find it, and ALEKS will apologize to you sincerely and thank you for helping them find a mistake. Incidentally, please be sure you have a genuine complaint. ALEKS will examine your exact record in the system -- exactly what you put in, and when -- and communicate the results to your instructor as well as to you. Your instructor has access to the same complete record of what you do in ALEKS, including when you work, for how long, what you enter, how ALEKS responds, everything. It will not serve you well to complain about ALEKS when the real problem turns out to be you managed your time poorly, or were extremely careless, or did not understand some key concept in chemistry.

What do you do after you've fired off your angry e-mail to ALEKS? You have two options: first, just ask ALEKS for a new problem on the topic. Each problem is a little different, and if you haven't found a major problem, there's a strong chance the next problem won't have it, and you can complete the topic. Even if you get another "broken" problem, you can almost certainly still complete the topic, because you don't have to get every problem right to get credit in ALEKS.

Second, if the whole topic seems broken, or you're sick of it, just work on another topic. It's very rare you'll only have one topic on which you can work, and rarer still that this isn't the very last topic in a goal anyway.

How Do I Get This Thing Working?

ALEKS runs through your Web browser, on any computer, yours or a friends or mom’s, so you have access to ALEKS almost anywhere and anytime. It's designed to run as painlessly as possible, but with the huge variety of computers and browsers and set-ups out there, sometimes you may need some technical assistance to get things running, or iron some strange behavior out.

Call ALEKS Customer Support. Your instructors can't help at all with this, but ALEKS has people who know all about computers on staff, and they will work with you to fix any technical problems as fast as possible. Your fastest response is to go to the Support website, http://support.aleks.com/, and describe the problem in detail. You can also try calling 714 619 7090 during the hours listed below.

Useful links: (Someone will e-mail you or call you promptly.)
http://www.aleks.com/support/contact_support_highered

How ALEKS Works: http://www.aleks.com/video/how_aleks_works