

COMP 523 F26 Student Guide

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Welcome

Hi all,

My name is Vinir and I am your TA for COMP 523.

My goal is to help you succeed in this course and remove obstacles for you. I want every team to deliver a high-quality project to their client by the end of the semester.

What I want you to know

1. Time management

We have about 12 weeks to work on the project. That is not a lot of time once you account for holidays, midterms, finals and job interviews.

I understand you have other commitments, but please manage your time well from day one.

2. Team dynamics and contributions

Let me know right away if you see significant contribution imbalances (free-riding) within your team.

If you wait until the last 2 or 3 weeks of the semester to report an issue, it is too late for me to intervene. It also hurts your evaluation from me and your final grade.

Early communication lets us remove obstacles and get the team back on track.

3. AI usage policy

You are strongly encouraged to use AI tools to help with your project (for example coding assistance, debugging and iteration).

However, you **MUST NOT** generate written deliverables or assignments directly from AI tools or LLMs without significant human revision and oversight.

See:

- [Guidance on Generative AI Use](#)
- [Generative AI Resources for Learning](#)
- [UNC Honor Code](#)

4. Reference project websites

You can look at project websites from previous semesters to understand the expected format:

- [F25](#)
- [S25](#)
- [S23](#)

Grading and assessment

COMP 523 manager form

For each meeting I will record:

- Attendance
- Web journal updates
- Achievement of the weekly plan
- Plan for the upcoming week
- Demo status (Gave a demo? Did it work?)
- Deliverable status (On the web? Changes made?)

Final report

At the end of the semester I will submit a holistic report for each team to the Professor.

This report evaluates your progress across the whole semester. Teams that make consistent progress will be rated more favorably than teams that rush to generate content in the final week.

I will assess the final product on this scale:

Grade	Meaning
A	Excellent project, all things considered

Grade	Meaning
B	Good to very good, considering the circumstances
C	Could have done better, but didn't

Note: I provide these evaluations, but the final grade is determined by the Professor.

Semester requirements

This semester I am enforcing the following technical standards to keep projects maintainable.

Weekly meetings

We meet on Zoom every week in your team's time slot. These meetings are required and I take attendance. If you can't make it, email me at least 2 days in advance and have the rest of your team catch you up before the next meeting.

Weekly reporting

Every week you **MUST** complete the following by 11:59 PM on the day before your regular meeting slot.

1. **Update the project website** with a concise progress report in PPP format:
 - **Progress (what happened):** Specific tasks completed and deliverables finished. Also list what you tried but failed at (for example: tried JWT auth but stuck on token refresh).
 - **Plans (what is next):** Specific goals you commit to finishing by next week.
 - **Problems (where you are stuck):** Any blockers, bugs or external issues (for example waiting on client feedback). If you have no problems, write None.
2. **Send confirmation:** Email me a link to the website letting me know it has been updated.

Project website

Hosting options:

- [TarHeels.live](https://tarheels.live)
- [Google Sites](https://sites.google.com/)

- Others

Any tech stack is fine, but you **MUST** make sure the project website still exists after the course ends.

On TarHeels.live, name your handle `Team[Your Team Letter]COMP523F26`. For example, Team T would use `TeamTCOMP523F26`.

Version control (Git)

You **MUST** use Git to manage your code repository. Hosting options are GitHub, Bitbucket or GitLab. Any host is fine, but you **MUST** make sure the repository still exists after the course ends.

Branching strategy: Use the [Gitflow workflow](#) or a similarly structured branching strategy.

Commit messages: Keep commit messages consistent and meaningful. Choose a style guide and stick to it strictly, for example [How to Write a Git Commit Message](#) or [Conventional Commits 1.0.0](#). If you use AI to generate commit messages, verify they are accurate and match your chosen style.

Git hooks: Use Git hooks (for example pre-commit) to enforce at least:

- Commit message style checks
- Coding style and linting checks

Use [pre-commit](#) or an equivalent template. **DO NOT** use AI or LLMs to enforce this. See the [Atlassian guide to Git hooks](#) and these examples:

- Education: [lab0-c pre-commit hook](#)
- Industry: [openpilot pre-commit config](#)

Git commit tips:

- Make commits as atomic (focused on one task) as possible.
- NEVER commit secret credentials such as API keys or passwords.

Learn Git commands: [Learn Git Branching](#) and [Explain Git with D3](#).

Coding style

Pick an auto formatter (clang-format, Black for Python, ESLint or similar) and enforce it through a Git hook or editor settings (format on save).

Project tracking

You MUST use [Kanban](#) (or another agile method from the course) to manage project progress.

Tip: on GitHub, the Projects tab has a built-in Kanban template.

The computer scientist as toolsmith

From Fred Brooks, [The Computer Scientist as Toolsmith](#). Two of his criteria for success in a tool are:

1. It must be so easy to use that a full professor can use it.
2. It must be so productive that full professors will use it.

AI tools

This semester you MUST use AI tools as much as you can to help you and your team, for example:

- Anthropic Claude
- Google Gemini
- OpenAI ChatGPT
- Microsoft Copilot from UNC

When you do, make sure that you:

- Review the code it produces instead of just copying and pasting it.
- DO NOT leak sensitive information to LLMs (for example personal info, business secrets or HIPAA-related info).

Free AI tools for students

- **ChatGPT:** GPT Pro free for 4 months, including Codex: chatgpt.com/students/2026
- **Google Gemini:** Gemini Pro free for 1 year: gemini.google/students
- **Claude Builder Club:** sometimes gives out 6 months of Claude Pro for free (this one is not confirmed): [join the GroupMe](#)
- **GitHub Student Developer Pack:** free Copilot Pro for 1 year: education.github.com/pack