



# Step 1: Understanding the Assignment

Did you know that many students lose points on their assignments by not following directions? This worksheet will help you to understand as much as possible about your assignment and your intended audience so you will be able to write your paper more effectively. Use additional paper if needed.

- 1) Read the assignment aloud to yourself (SLOWLY!). Pay particular attention to the tasks you are to complete. Look for details. This may seem strange at first but try it anyway.
- 2) Underline, highlight, or number each instruction or detail in the prompt. Here is an abbreviated example of a prompt from a literature class.

**Example:**

Write a persuasive<sup>1</sup> essay that analyzes the theme<sup>2</sup> of the story. Include a strong thesis<sup>3</sup>. Show how the author uses two literary devices<sup>4, 5</sup> to illustrate the theme. Use a minimum of three outside sources.<sup>6</sup>

- 3) Now, make a to-do list of all the tasks. Jot down notes next to each instruction or detail to help you think through all the things you need to consider regarding that item. Based on the sample prompt above, here is an example of how to think carefully about your assignment.

**Example:**

- a) Must be persuasive—What makes a literary analysis persuasive?
  - b) Analyze the theme—What do I think the theme is? What are some alternative themes? Which possible theme seems most compelling to me?
  - c) Include a strong thesis—What should a thesis look like for this type of paper? What evidence would persuade my audience that my interpretation of the theme is correct?
  - d) First literary device:
  - e) Second literary device:
  - f) First outside source:
  - g) Second outside source:
  - h) Third outside source:
- 4) Write down any terms you do not know. Look them up in your textbook, in your class notes, or in the dictionary and write the appropriate definition beside each term. The Writing Center's handout, "Terms to Know in English 1301," also has brief definitions for terms used in writing research papers.
    - a) Term 1:
    - b) Term 2:



- c) Term 3:
- d) Term 4:
- 5) Are there any requirements not explicitly stated in the prompt but are necessary to complete the assignment? Write them here. **Example:** Correct spelling, good sentence structure, a strong conclusion, etc.
- 6) What is the purpose for this essay? Are you supposed to state your opinion (argument)? Do you want your audience to believe your analysis (persuasive)? Are you just sharing facts, as does a reporter (informative)? If you are unclear, be sure to ask your instructor. If you do not understand the purpose of the assignment, then chances are you will write the wrong kind of paper.
- 7) Who is your audience for this paper (besides your instructor)? Are you writing to a general college-educated audience, an organization, your classmates, or a group of people who disagree with you? What has your instructor said about audience?
- 8) What kind of characteristics does this audience have? HINT: Put yourself in your readers' shoes. What do they believe? What do they know about your topic?
- 9) What does your audience NOT know about your topic? What will you have to tell them?
- 10) Why should your readers care about this topic? How will you make your essay interesting and relevant to them?
- 11) What kinds of information will your readers respond to? What kinds of evidence will they find convincing? Make a list and use it to help guide your research.