

Understanding Your Assignment

Follow these tips to gain a better understanding of what your assignment guidelines are asking you to do.

Read your assignment carefully.

And more than once! Also note the words, concepts, or phrases that you do not understand and then define them (if you can).

Break the assignment guidelines into parts.

The prompt may begin by **setting a context** of some kind, such as the topic of last week's discussions.

"As we have been reviewing structuralism..."

Next, look for **what you are asked to do** (in the assignment) in light of this context. Look for terms like:

- Analyze
 - Summarize
 - Argue
 - Justify
 - Compare
- *Define these if you are unsure of their meaning!

These words tell you exactly what your assignment should accomplish. Sometimes there may be more than one task. For example,

"Summarize David Foster Wallace's article and analyze why/how his language appeals to the reader."

Then your instructor might include **additional information** that relates to the topic of the assignment to get you thinking in the right direction. For example:

"Consider the consequences of the 1979 Iranian Revolution."

Lastly, look for **style and formatting guidelines**. Sometimes your professor might include a way to structure your essay, for example, and be sure to follow it. Other style tips might include phrases like:

"Be specific with..." or *"Keep your audience in mind"*

Formatting guidelines may include font, size, margin size, and formatting style (MLA, APA, Chicago, for example).

It is always a good idea to go to your professor with questions about the assignment if you still cannot understand what he/she may be looking for, or are even just unsure.



EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

As we have discussed in class, many Romantic works are characterized by a spiritualized appreciation for nature. Pick three Romantic works and compare/contrast their attitude towards nature. Is nature portrayed positively or negatively? How? You might consider the works of Wordsworth and/or Coleridge. Be specific with your examples and follow the MLA format.

If we break these guidelines down...

Context: The Romantic era's appreciation for nature

Your task: Compare and contrast how three Romantic works speak about nature.

Additional info: Wordsworth and Coleridge will have works involving this topic AND One way you can compare/contrast is discussing whether nature is portrayed positively or negatively.

Style/format: Use specific examples, and use MLA format.

Other tips!

- Pay close attention to the technical details like preferred font size, type, page length, etc. It is easy to overlook these details, but they are important to your instructor if included!
- For a more detailed guide to understating your assignment visit: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/understanding-assignments/>

