

The first step to succeeding in college writing is to understand the assignment. While this sounds simple, it can be challenging. This handout will provide you with the tools necessary to begin your writing journey.

Step One: Read

1. Read the Assignment Promptly: Start reviewing it as soon as you get it to avoid last-minute stress and save time. This is a great opportunity to meet with a Writing Center Tutor to read the assignment together.
2. Seek Clarifications: If you have any questions, ask your instructor right away. This will allow your concerns to be addressed early on.

Step Two: Analyze

Assignments usually consist of the following components:

- Overview: Provides the topic and context.
- Task Description: Includes key verbs that specify your tasks (e.g., analyze, compare).
- Additional Suggestions: Optional prompts to help guide your thoughts.
- Style Tips: Advice on writing style.
- Technical Details: Rules for formatting and submission.

Step Three: Reflect

Consider the following questions:

- What is the purpose of this task?
- Who is your audience?
- What type of evidence is necessary?
- What writing style and tone should you use?
- What are the non-negotiable guidelines?
- What is my instructor's goal in assigning this?
 - how does this assignment meet the course goals?

Step Four Understand Key Terms

- Define: Explain the subject's meaning.
- Describe: Provide details about the subject.
- Explain: Give reasons or examples.
- Summarize: Briefly list important ideas.
- Compare: Show similarities.
- Contrast: Show differences.
- Apply: Demonstrate how an idea works in a specific situation.
- Cause: Show how events cause other events.
- Relate: Describe connections between things.
- Assess: Summarize and measure against something.
- Prove/Justify: Provide reasons or examples.
- Evaluate: State your opinion with examples and reasons.
- Support: Give evidence for your belief.
- Synthesize: Combine ideas and provide a reason for their connection.
- Analyze: Determine how parts relate to the whole.
- Argue: Defend a side with evidence.

Step Five: Plan

- Highlight key information, such as the due date, formatting, length, and required sources.
- Jot down the due date in your planner, and create a game plan for how you plan to tackle the assignment.
- Seek assistance with a Writing Center Tutor to get started with the next step: prewriting!

Sources:

"Understanding Assignments." The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2023, <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/understanding-assignments/>. Accessed 1 July 2024.