

Student Writing Center Resource: Understanding Your Writing Assignment

1) Read the assignment carefully as soon as you receive it.

- This may seem obvious, but it's important enough to mention. Reading the assignment right away will save you time, stress, and problems later.
- An assignment can look straightforward, particularly if the instructor has provided a lot of information. But, that doesn't mean it won't take time and effort to complete.

2) Underline the verbs (action words). These are key to what your professor is asking you to do. Some key verbs to look out for include (but are not limited to):

- **apply**—use details that you've been given to demonstrate how an idea, theory, or concept works in a particular situation
- **relate**—show or describe the connections between things
- **assess**—summarize your opinion of the subject and measure it against something
- **prove, justify**—give reasons or examples to demonstrate how or why something is the truth
- **evaluate, respond**—state your opinion of the subject as good, bad, or some combination of the two, with examples and reasons
- **support**—give reasons or evidence for something you believe (be sure to state clearly what it is that you believe)
- **synthesize**—put two or more things together that have not been put together in class or in your readings before; do not just summarize one and then the other and say that they are similar or different—you must provide a reason for putting them together that runs all the way through the paper
- **analyze**—determine how individual parts create or relate to the whole, figure out how something works, what it might mean, or why it is important

3) Ask yourself these questions as you read the assignment, and jot down the answers on the assignment sheet:

- Why did your instructor ask you to do this particular task/what is the purpose of the assignment?
- Who is your audience?
- What are you being asked to do? (You should be able to put this into your words)
- What kind of evidence do you need to support your ideas?
- What are the rules/logistics of the paper? (APA format? Submit through Blackboard?)
- Does the assignment suggest or indicate how to organize the paper?
- Does the assignment offer any other tips for writing the paper?

If you're unsure about what's expected of you, talk it out with a classmate and/or ask your instructor for clarification.