

UNDERSTANDING THE ASSIGNMENT | ASSIGNMENT ANALYSIS

When analyzing a writing assignment, you are looking for information about the assignment’s purpose, audience, and style/format. Use the tables in this handout to analyze the assignment on which you are working. As you work, make notes on the assignment sheet, and be sure to ask your instructor for clarification if necessary.

Part I: Overview of the Assignment		
Element	Key Questions	Current Assignment Information
Purpose or focus	How does this paper fit into the overall course? What should it demonstrate about you as a student in this class?	
Subjective or objective voice	Are you making an opinioned claim (subjective), or are you presenting information neutrally (objective)?	
Thesis or theme statement	Does the assignment require that you state a thesis or central theme? If so, where should it be located?	
Sources/Research	Do you need to include information from sources? Is independent research required, or should you rely only upon course texts?	
Audience or Readers*	How much summary should you include? Which terms/concepts do you need to define? What kind of language do I use (formal/informal, specialized jargon, etc)?	
Style/Format	Are there guidelines for format: margin width, font size, required headers and page numbers, specified structure or order of information?	
Length	How long should it be? Does your instructor ask for a specific number of pages or words?	
Citation format	Is MLA, APA, or other citation format required? Where will you find those guidelines?	

**TIP: In academic writing, the implied audience is usually your peers; pretend you are teaching a college class on the topic.*



Part II: Exploring other Resources to Fill in Missing Details

Resource	Key Questions	Current Assignment Information
Additional notes/ requirements	What other specific requirements or suggestions are included on the assignment sheet? On the syllabus?	
Grading Rubric	Has the instructor explained how she grades the assignment? What is the most important thing he is looking for?	
Models	Are there any examples of previous successful assignments that you can look at for guidance? Are there works you have read in class that might work as a model?	
Instructor	What has your instructor told you about the assignment? Is he available to answer questions? In lecture, does your instructor ask your opinion, try to prove her point of view, or use keywords that show up again in the assignment?	
Other Students	Have other students written similar papers before? Have they taken courses from the same instructor? Can they be resources for you?	
Tutors	Is a tutor available for the class? Have they spoken to the instructor? Are they willing to talk to you about your paper?	
The Class Itself	How do the assignments, readings, and lectures work together in the course? Instructors spend time designing courses, sometimes even arguing with their peers about the most effective course materials. Figuring out the overall design to the course will help you understand what each assignment is meant to achieve.	
The Discipline	What kinds of assignments are typical in this discipline? Social science classes often expect more research. Humanities classes thrive on interpretation and analysis.	