
Writing prompts can be difficult to understand and even harder to respond to. This handout will walk you through how to deconstruct and understand any individual writing prompt so you are prepared to work on your writing assignment. This handout will also provide you with a space to analyze your prompt in real-time.

Before you begin writing your assignment, you should be aware of different kinds of writing. Based on the prompt, the class structure, and the discipline, the expected writing response may vary. Below are the four main types of writing that you might complete. Sometimes you may work within multiple types of writing simultaneously.

Expository

Examples:

Personal narrative
Creative writing
Interviews

Persuasive

This type of writing aims to encourage the reader or audience to take a particular action toward an issue. Persuasive writing is also used when developing or contributing to logical arguments.

Examples:

Persuasive essay
Op-eds
Advertisements

When you're analyzing a prompt, there are usually three major sections of information. Each section includes information that is important but may only be necessary for certain parts of your assignment. For example, if you're working on understanding the context of your prompt and the class notes you should use, then you will probably focus on the background information. However, if you are revising your paper, then you may want to focus on the logistical requirements. Mark up the prompt and highlight the prompt according to the following.

Background Information

This information is contextual and provides you, the student writer, with information about what kind of information will be needed to complete the assignment. This may be information about what class lectures you'll be referring to, what class theories to discuss, or how this assignment will prepare you for future classwork.

Logistical Information

This information includes due dates, notes on formatting styles, and requirements for the particular assignment you're completing. These notes may not always impact the content you provide for this assignment, but they will be important as you prepare to submit your assignment.

To-Dos

This part of the prompt will tell you what the professor is looking for in the assignment. The "To-Dos" will often include action verbs like "explain," "analyze," or "describe." This part of the prompt is what you will focus on as you prepare for the assignment and will help you construct a thesis statement.

following to-do list is a general guideline. Your to-do list may be similar, but it will use information from your to-do actions in the prompt to narrow your list items.

Tip: This to-do list can also be used to create an outline!

Review the background information in the prompt and consider what notes or materials you will need to complete the assignment.

Locate the action verbs (see the above sections for examples) and determine what you are being asked to *do* in this piece of writing.

Consider what kind of response you will be providing using background information and the action verbs.

Write out the topic for your paper and your thesis statement. For more help with crafting a thesis, see our handout on [“How To Develop a Working Thesis Statement.”](#)

Continue brainstorming, outlining, and/or writing your assignment from there! We have several handouts that provide brainstorming, outlining, and other writing tools if you have questions. Visit our [Homegrown Handouts](#) for more information.

Once you’re finished writing, review all logistical requirements and ensure that you’ve met the word count, followed the formatting guidelines, and adhered to any other items included by your professor.

Tip: If you’re having trouble comprehending the prompt, try taking brief notes as you work through it. You can also schedule an appointment at the Writing Center to talk out your ideas or work on an outline.

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