



Questions To Ask Instructors About Assignments

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Good assignments contain certain information that allows students to show how much they know about the topic(s), not how good they are at guessing the instructor's intentions.

When you get an assignment for a paper, you should get or be prepared to ask for at least the following information:

- ♣ Is there a written handout for the assignment? If so, be sure you get it.
- ♣ Whether or not there is a written handout, you should know the answers to these questions:
 - What is the topic? Is there a choice?
 - What is the purpose of the assignment?

This is in part aimed at the question, “Who is the intended audience?” Are you supposed to be writing a mock article that supposedly could be read and used by other professionals in the field? Or are you writing for a reasonably intelligent person who knows little about the subject? Are you writing to characterize a situation, to inform, to explore sides of an issue, to analyze, to criticize, to persuade, or a combination of these?

- ♣ Are there any special directions on style or point of view that must be followed?
- ♣ If terms like “discuss,” “evaluate,” “summarize,” etc. are not defined, are you sure what they mean? Some teachers assume that these terms have a generic, universal meaning (and many do), so they may not define them.

The underlined part of the following paragraph is an example of a definition of “evaluate.”

Evaluate Graham Allison's statement, “I conclude that public and private management are at least as different as they are similar, and that the differences are more important than the similarities” (Perry and Kraemer, p. 87). Use the ideal presented in the readings, class lectures, and discussions to identify the areas where his statement is supported by his own and other evidence, and where it is not.

- ♣ What length is expected?
- ♣ Are class textbooks and lecture notes to be used as references, or is that looked on as cheating? Are there specifications about the nature or amount of printed sources to be used (books, journals, interviews). Is consultation with other class members allowed?
- ♣ Must it be typed? If so, in what format?
- ♣ What style of documentation is to be used (MLA, APA, Turabian, any)?
- ♣ What is the due date?

If you cannot answer one or more of these questions, ask the instructor.