

ANALYZING ASSIGNMENTS

As soon as students receive an assignment from their professors, they should ask the following questions:

1. What instruction am I being given?
(Circle key words such as *discuss, explore, propose, analyze, explain, and research.*)
2. What material/theories does the assignment ask me to include/consider?
(Underline words, ideas and phrases listed in the assignment.)
3. If the assignment begins with a general discussion or quotation followed by an instruction:
What is the relationship between the two parts?
4. Who is the intended audience for this paper?
(If it is not clear from the assignment, assume the audience to be other academics in the discipline who are familiar with the material and might read your work to learn something further about the subject. Assume that the audience knows at least as much about the topic as do you and your peers.)
5. What kinds of responses would not be appropriate? That is, what are the limits imposed on your paper? For example, plot summary is almost never appropriate in college.
6. Finally, write a two-to-six sentence summary of exactly what you are being asked to do. Imagine you are explaining the assignment to a peer who missed class or who simply does not understand the assignment. Don't plan the paper, or summarize what you might write; simply write out in detail what you are being asked to do.