



Consultant Thoughts on Writing Prompts

What are the characteristics of a clear, easy to comprehend writing assignment?

- Clear assignments have the question in bold, are precise in their expectations of students, and are always less than 1 page long.
- They provide an overview of the main ideas of the class and link them to the assignment in simple language.
- They indicate the specific formatting that should be used.
- They state the genre of the paper (research paper, analysis, reflection) and whether the student should use outside sources.
- A clear writing assignment always asks a question. They can be framed with background information, but not information irrelevant to the assignment.

What are the most common points of confusion for students in the Workshop as they work with writing assignments?

- The assignments are too vague and do not provide enough background details. Students tend to complain that they can write about anything on a subject and therefore feel overwhelmed.
- Students tell me they are confused about what the professor is asking because they don't understand the goal of the assignment.
- Students ask me to help them decode what the professor is *really* asking when there is more than one question, or when the prompt is more than a page long.
- Students don't know what to do when professors say "write about anything" or do not provide a prompt.
- Students always ask me which citation method to use, and if they are allowed to use sources.

What are some things you'd like to see clarified in assignments?

- I like it when professors use bullet points to show ways to go about writing papers. That way, I can see exactly what they're looking for.
- Indicate whether students should have a thesis.
- Identify a particular question that the students should address.
- Indicate whether you want students to address all the questions listed if there is more than one.
- Prompts should be 1 page or less.
- Instructions help beginning students understand what is expected. For example, what do you want to see in an introduction? What do you see as the purpose of a conclusion paragraph?
- As a student, I have found that I only understand what the teacher wanted *after* receiving a grade. I think it would be helpful to explain what an A paper does, what a B paper does, etc., so that students understand what is expected of them from the beginning.
- Hold yourself to the same standards in writing your prompt as you'd hold your students to in answering it. Typos, awkward sentences, and unclear questions are just confusing.