

## Assignment Analysis

Before starting an essay, it is important to know what is being asked of you and why. By looking at the assignment in detail, you can prevent the devastation of having to rewrite your entire paper.

You can start by looking at the broader context, key terms, and details of the assignment.

### 1. Broader Context

Look for clues in the course description, syllabus, and professor/TA comments to answer

- How does the assignment fit into the overall course and discipline?
- What are the course's learning objectives?
- What skills does your instructor want you to demonstrate?

### 2. Key Terms

Generally, the nouns in the assignment description will tell you what you should *know* and the verbs will tell you what you should *do*. Key verbs will often fit into three categories: *information, relation, interpretation*. Here's a list of just a few common terms (there are plenty more):

Information: Show what you're talking about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define: Give concise, authoritative meaning</li> <li>• Explain: Give reasons why or examples of how something happened</li> <li>• Illustrate: Use a figure, diagram, or concrete example to explain/clarify a subject</li> <li>• Summarize: Briefly list the important ideas of the topic</li> </ul>
Relation: Show how the concepts are connected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare/contrast: Show how things are similar or dissimilar</li> <li>• Apply: Use given concepts or theories to explain a problem, issue, event, etc.</li> <li>• Relate: Describe the connections between multiple things</li> <li>• Trace: Follow the process, development, or sequence of events from start to finish</li> </ul>
Interpretation: Defend your own ideas about the subject
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate: Appraise a subject, citing advantages and limitations, with examples</li> <li>• Support: Give evidence for something you believe</li> <li>• Synthesize: Put two or more ideas together that have not been connected before</li> <li>• Analyze: Break down a subject into parts; show how they relate together as a whole</li> <li>• Argue: Take a stance and defend it with supporting evidence</li> </ul>

### 3. Details

You don't want to miss points for the little things. If you're unclear about any of these points, ask your professor or TA for more information, or look back at the broader context of the course to intuit what the expectations might be.

- Audience (academic, general, specialized)
- Voice (formal/informal)
- Length requirement (page/word count)
- Citation format (APA, MLA, Chicago)
- Sources (How many? What kind?)
- Particular structure requirement

## Example Assignment Analysis

Class: Writing 1 (or other introductory writing course)

*Assignment:* Summarize one of the articles from our readings on global warming. Write to what extent you agree or disagree with the author and support your argument with evidence from class readings. Your paper should be 1,500-1,800 words and in MLA format.

Broader Context:

The goal of an introductory writing class is to prepare you for more advanced university writing. The instructor will want to see that you can read and understand a text and that you can argue and support your own ideas.

Key Terms:

Verbs	Nouns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize: Briefly list the important ideas of the topic</li> <li>• Support: Give evidence for something you believe</li> <li>• Argue (argument): Take a side and defend it with evidence against the other side</li> <li>• Agree/disagree: More specific detail of our argument</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global warming: The noun showing what your topic is (what you should <i>know</i>)</li> </ul>

Basically, the prompt is telling you to

1. choose an article about global warming that you read for class,
2. briefly list the most important ideas of that author's argument,
3. agree or disagree (to some extent) with the author,
4. state and defend your own argument based on your agreement/disagreement, and
5. use evidence to support your ideas.

Details:

Audience:	Though not explicitly stated, we can assume that the audience is academic because you're responding to academic articles and are asked to provide academic evidence.
Voice:	Following the reasoning above, the voice should be formal and academic.
Length:	1,500-1,800 words
Citation:	MLA
Sources:	Multiple class readings
Structure:	No particular structure guidelines are given, but because you're following general MLA style and writing an argumentative essay, the typical intro(with thesis)-body-conclusion structure should be appropriate.

Your Turn

Take time to dissect your paper. Identify the context, highlight the key terms and phrases, and pay attention to all the details. Print your prompt and write on it, use the space below, or work through your assignment analysis on a separate sheet of paper.

Don't forget to return to this analysis after you write your first draft to ensure you have addressed the prompt and all its requirements.

Context:	
Key Words:	
Audience:	
Voice:	
Length:	
Citation:	
Sources:	
Structure:	