

Tips from the Writing Center: Reading Assignment Prompts

Although assignments from different classes and professors rarely look alike, most typically include basic components to help students know what the professor expects you to do.

Part of an assignment	What to look for and why
Goals and connection to course content and objectives	There may be references to texts or assignments from class. This will help you know how to connect it to class material. Pay attention when your professor introduces the assignment in-class as the connections may be verbal or assumed. Ask if you are unsure.
Action verb(s)	Action verbs can give you important clues about how to approach the task. Common ones are: analyze, argue, summarize, compare, contrast, interpret, or reflect. See <i>action verbs</i> below.
Question(s)	There may be one central question you are required to answer throughout, or there may be a list of questions that are simply thought provoking. In that case, you are not required to answer them all. Ask if you are unsure how to approach questions.
Style and tone	Look for: “academic voice,” “formal,” “personal,” and/or “informal” to give you an idea of the expected style and tone.
Technical details	Typed or handwritten? Length? Font? Margins? Citation style? Due date(s)? First draft and final draft required? Electronic or printed copy? These details are considered “technical” in that they are not related to your writing’s content.

Action verbs in assignment prompts typically suggest a certain approach.

Action Verb	What it suggests
Define, explain, illustrate, summarize	Information words ask you to demonstrate what you know about the subject, such as who, what, when, where, how, and why.
Research	Research indicates that you should gather material from outside sources about the subject, often with the implication or requirement that you will analyze what you find.
Compare, contrast, apply, cause, relate	Relation words ask you to demonstrate how things are connected or describe the connections between things.
Argue, prove, justify, evaluate, support, synthesize, analyze	Interpretation words ask you to defend ideas of your own about the subject. Do not see these words as requesting opinion alone (unless the assignment specifically says so), but as requiring opinion that is supported by concrete evidence. Remember examples, principles, definitions, or concepts from class or research and use them in your interpretation.



Visit www.bellarmino.edu/writingcenter for appointments and information

Information from: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/understanding-assignments/>