

Writing Strategies: A Step-By-Step Guide

Step 1: Analyze the Assignment

- If the assignment was given orally, write it out and read it until you're thoroughly familiar with it.
- Look for key words. Pay particular attention to the thought process your instructor expects you to use, which is often captured in a single or set of key words.
- Look for what form your paper is expected to take; Essay, Research, Reaction, Journal, Synthesis or Review

Step 2: Consider the Writing Situation

Successful college writers look beyond the assignment to the larger picture and seek to understand the purpose and audience for the assignment.

- **Purposes:** Why has my professor given me this assignment? Is it intended primarily to test my knowledge of the reading for the study, or is it asking me to go beyond the reading? Am I expected to break new ground? What might I hope to accomplish? Why is the subject important?
- **Audience:** Who is the intended audience? Who will be my audience beyond the professor? Who else might be interested in reading this paper? Why should my reader be interested in what I will do in this paper?

Step 3: Ask Questions

If the assignment's purpose, subject or audience is not clear ask your professor questions such as:

- What would you like me to learn from writing this?
- Who is the target audience?
- What form do you want me to use?

Make sure you understand what kind of thinking and what type of paper is expected. Sometimes your questions help a professor clarify an assignment.

Step 4: Ask to See a Sample

Ask to see a model of what the instructor wants. Student models are often the most help. Seeing models of what is expected will help you respond to the assignment effectively.

Most Important Step 



Step 5: Make the Assignment Your Own

After you are sure about what's expected in an assignment:

- turn the question around; instead of asking, "What does the instructor want?" ask, "What do I want to say about the assigned subject or question?"
- ask yourself about your knowledge and experience of the subject: "What are the limits of my knowledge and how can I learn more?"; write down what you already know about the topic, why you care about it and why you think your reader should care about it
- answer the question, "Why write about this, anyway?"; look for a slant on the question that reflects who you are
- relate the assignment to something you're familiar with; don't hesitate to ask if you can modify the assignment a little so you can do something you really want to do
- read over what you have written until you can "hear" it; when you can let it flow through your hands onto the screen or paper, you have found your voice

The writing process is frustrating and enlightening, thrilling and discouraging, humbling and exalting, just like life.

Writing is also an empowering process, as essayist and literary critic William Hazlitt noted, "The more a man writes, the more he can write."

Writing is a way to add texture and meaning to your life, to be surprised by discovering what you know and what you don't know, whether you're writing a research paper, a letter to a friend or starting a novel.