

Topic: Dissecting the Assignment

Purpose

Imagine going to a restaurant and ordering a well-done burger with lettuce, tomato, and pickles. You give the server your specific order. The server tells you s/he understands and will be back with your food. When the server comes back, s/he gives you a perfect and beautiful presentation of a rare burger with onions.

- Are you going to eat the burger? Probably not.
- Are you going to pay for it? Probably not.
- Why? Because it wasn't what you ordered.
- *That's how instructors feel about assignments!*

The assignment (like your well-done burger) is what they want.

- If you are not clear on the assignment guidelines, ask for clarification.
- Do not guess and give them a paper that has nothing to do with what they requested.
- Even if the presentation is perfect, if you have not addressed the requirements, you did not complete the order.

Why dissect an assignment?

- Dissecting an assignment means to *closely* read your professor's assignment guidelines, and pay careful attention to the prompt and to the instructions.
- A well-written paper that does not give the professor what s/he specifically asks for will not receive a high grade.
- Dissecting the assignment will allow you to focus on answering every part of the assignment.
- Dissecting the assignment will also help you create an outline and create main ideas.

Step one: The guidelines

- Professors will provide assignment guidelines in various ways such as online, print, or verbally.
- Read through the entire assignment guidelines. If you are unclear about any part of the assignment, ask the professor for clarification.
- Keep the assignment guidelines available during the writing process so you can frequently refer to them and stay on track (it is helpful to use the assignment as a checklist during the entire writing process).

Step two: The details

- Print the assignment guidelines and highlight the following:
 - *Due date:* Plan ahead and allow time to research, write, and revise.
 - *Page length:* Meet the specified page length without going over.

- *Sources*: Is outside research required? If so, note the following:
 - Number of sources and types of sources. Scholarly, peer-reviewed sources can be found on the FSC Library website.
- *Documentation style*: MLA , APA
 - For assistance with documentation, (*see MLA or APA videos*), or visit the FSC Writing Center.

Step three: Dissecting prompts

- Reread the prompt and highlight the questions the professor is asking. Each point should be addressed in a section of your paper.
 - *Hint: Number the main questions or points to address in order of importance.*
- Circle key words and phrases your professor has used in the prompt that may have special meaning, especially words/phrases that are repeated or have been emphasized in class.
 - *Hint: You will want to reference these in your paper.*

Step four: Common requirements

- Sometimes your instructor will not specify certain requirements. However, it is your responsibility to know the following details about your assignment:
 - Font size and style
 - Page length
 - Point of view (Avoiding or including 1st, 2nd or 3rd person)
 - Documentation style (MLA, APA, Chicago)
 - Number of sources and citations

Note: If these requirements are not stated, clarify with your instructor.