

UNDERSTANDING ASSIGNMENT PROMPTS

Every prompt asks for something a little different. Writers must form a strategy to understand exactly what they need to do in order complete the assignment and stay on track.

Don't be afraid to talk to your professor. Sometimes prompts are vague or seem contradictory. If you have trouble figuring out what a professor is looking for, ask him or her for clarification.

BREAKING DOWN A PROMPT

1. **Read prompt carefully** – Are you being asked to summarize? Analyze? Compare/contrast? Reflect?
2. **Create a list of requirements** – List every aspect of what you are being asked to do. This could include (but is not limited to) the following:
 - a. Content elements
 1. Answer a question
 2. Make an argument
 3. Provide context
 4. Explain a topic
 - b. Practical elements
 1. Use a specific type/amount of sources
 2. Stick to a specific word count
 3. Format according to a specific style
3. **Create a thesis*** – If your thesis fulfills the content requirements, the rest of your paper should follow suit.
4. **Write your paper with the practical requirements in mind** – A paper with 1500 words requires more outlining than a discussion post with 200 words. Similarly, a research paper will need more sources than a personal reflection.
5. **Always compare finished product to original prompt** – If your paper strays from the elements of the prompt, you may need to revise.

*See [THESIS STRUCTURE](#), [THESIS TYPE](#), and [THESIS CHECKLIST](#) handouts for more information on creating a thesis statement

EXAMPLE PROMPT

PROMPT:

Does Smith's text undermine a key aspect of the Apostle Paul's message in Romans 13? Answer in 1000-1500 words. Be sure to provide arguments from both sides and support your position with scholarly sources.

RE-WRITE REQUIREMENTS AS A LIST

TIP: You can cross out filler words to get to the essential elements of the prompt.

(2) Does (1) Smith's text (2) undermine a key aspect of the **(1) Apostle Paul's gospel message in Romans 13?** ~~Answer in~~ **(4) 1000-1500 words.** ~~Be sure to~~ **(3) provide arguments from both sides and support your position with** **(5) scholarly sources.**

1. **Discuss Smith's text and Paul's message**
2. **Answer if Smith undermines Paul's message in Romans 13**
3. **Provide arguments for both**
4. Write 1000-1500 words
5. Scholarly sources

#1-3 all address content and should be incorporated into the thesis.

#4-5 give practical requirements for length and research.

CREATE A THESIS:

(1) While the Smith's perspective (3) seeks to provide clarification of Romans 13, (2) he ultimately undermines (1) Paul's message (3) by failing to establish credibility, examine the original language, and evaluate surrounding chapters.

This thesis answers the three content-related requirements of the prompt: **(1) Discussing the two texts, (2) answering the question,** and **(3) providing arguments.** The final two requirements (word count and scholarly sources) must be kept in mind as the paper is outlined and written.

PRACTICE NOW