



Clarifying Assignment Instructions

Why Asking for Help is Essential

In college, assignments are designed to challenge your critical thinking and writing skills. However, you might encounter vague instructions or unfamiliar expectations. Asking for clarification can ensure you're on the right path, saving you time and frustration. It's also a chance to engage with your instructors, develop clearer writing, and improve your grades.

Common Questions to Ask

1.) What is the Main Goal?

Understanding the purpose of the assignment will guide your approach. Ask for example: "Is the main focus of this essay to analyze or to persuade?"

2.) What Format is Expected?

Each discipline has its preferred formats (APA, MLA, etc.), so always confirm. Ask for example: "Do you prefer APA or MLA style for this paper?"

3.) Who is the Audience?

Knowing who you're writing for helps you adjust tone and content. Ask for example: "Should I assume my audience is familiar with this topic, or should I provide background information?"

4.) What Sources Should I Use?

Clarify what types of sources (books, articles, websites) are expected. Ask for example: "Are we required to use peer-reviewed journal articles for this research paper?"

5.) How Will I Be Graded?

Understanding the grading criteria will help you prioritize. Ask for example: "Could you explain how much emphasis is placed on the strength of the argument versus grammar?"

How to Approach Your Instructor

Be Specific: Instead of saying, "I'm confused," ask detailed questions.

Example: "I'm not sure if the main focus of the analysis should be historical context or the themes in the text. Could you clarify?"

Ask Early: Don't wait until the last minute!! Your professor will appreciate your proactive approach.

Use Office Hours: Office hours are a great time to ask detailed questions, get clarification and learn what your instructors' expectations are.

Rhetorical Questions to Help Clarify Your Understanding



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1.) How Am I Answering the Prompt Fully?

Reflect on whether your work addresses every aspect of the assignment.

Example: "In what ways have I covered all parts of the question in my response?"

2.) Is My Argument Clear?

Ensure that your thesis and supporting points are easy to follow.

Example: "How have I clearly stated my argument and backed it up with evidence?"

3.) How does My Writing Follow the Assignment Guidelines?

Check if your format, tone, and style match the assignment's expectations.

Example: "How am I using the right tone for a formal research paper?"

Examples of Assignment Clarification in Action

Scenario 1:

Assignment: Write a 5-page research paper on climate change.

Clarification Needed: You're not sure which sources to use.

Question: "Should my sources be limited to academic journals, or can I include credible news outlets?"

Scenario 2:

Assignment: Create a 10-minute presentation on a famous historical figure.

Clarification Needed: You're unsure how much detail to include.

Question: "Should I focus more on the person's achievements or their personal background?"

General Tips for Asking Questions

Ask a classmate: Sometimes small points of confusion can be cleared up by asking a fellow classmate.

Be Direct: Focus on one area of confusion to make your question clear.

Be Polite: Show respect for your instructor's time and insight.

Follow Up: After receiving an answer, clarify any remaining uncertainties.

Final Thoughts

Don't hesitate to ask questions when instructions are unclear. Your instructors want to see you succeed, and asking for clarification ensures you're putting your best try forward. It's not just about getting the assignment done—it's about improving on the process and producing the best work you can.