



Assignment Analysis

The first step in producing a successful college essay is to analyze the assignment. Then use your analysis to generate a working thesis statement, one that will guide your writing.

Ask yourself these questions, and follow the steps:

1. What instructions am I being given? Does the assignment prompt ask me to discuss, explore, compare, propose, analyze, explain, or research?
2. Underline key words and phrases in the assignment.
3. Who is the intended audience? If not clear, assume the audience to be other people who are familiar with the material and might read your work to learn something further about your subject. Assume that your audience knows at least as much about the topic as do you and your peers.
4. What kinds of responses would NOT be appropriate? For example, plot summary is almost never appropriate in college.
5. Write a two-to-six sentence summary of exactly ***what you are being asked to do***. Imagine you are explaining the assignment to a peer who missed class. (You could do this orally with someone from the class or with a Writing Resources Center consultant.)
6. Formulate a thesis statement for your essay using the following as guidelines:
 - a. **Avoid a “thesis” that is really a topic:**
 - The paper will explore Eudora Welty’s use of symbolism.
 - b. **Beware of theses that are too obvious:**
 - Eudora Welty uses names symbolically in her short story “Livvie.”
 - In “Livvie,” each name suggests something about the main characters.

Ask yourself, “So what?” or “Why?” as you interrogate your thesis statement. What are the implications of your argument? Why should a reader care about this? Push your thinking toward the construction of an argumentative claim, one that a reader could disagree with.

- a. **Effective thesis:**
 - In “Livvie,” Welty subtly critiques changes in the southern economy by having a character named Cash awaken Livvie’s sexuality as Solomon dies.

