

You've been given a writing assignment... what comes next?

Find out what your professor expects by:

- Reviewing your professor's comments on *past assignments*
- Examining the *syllabus*
- Finding out the *style*: MLA? APA? Chicago?*
- Listening carefully during *lectures*
- Discussing the project with your *classmates*
- Asking *questions* if you need to
- Picking apart the *prompt*

You may wonder what “picking apart the prompt” means. That’s perfectly fine! It means paying close attention to the words in the prompt so you can fulfill the professor’s expectations. Two ways to do this are to:

1. Find the **limits of the topic**

For example, if the prompt says, “Discuss elephant health in Africa,” then all of the facts you write into your essay should directly impact or help to explain the health of elephants in Africa.

2. Look for **“loaded words”**

Some examples: Research, analyze, summarize, compare, contrast, refute, define, support, evaluate, elaborate, argue, and narrate.

These verbs, and ones like them, convey specific expectations. Underline them, then **look them up** in a print or online **dictionary** or in a writing **textbook**. Alternatively, **ask a professor** or **a writing tutor** to explain them.

*check out <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/> for more information on these styles of formatting an essay.