

Writing to Answer an Assignment

- 1. Analyze the assignment.** Notice carefully the directive verb that tells you what you should do in your answer. Directive verbs that are commonly used in assignments are: explain, list, name, compare, contrast, describe, summarize, outline, apply, justify, defend, account for, clarify, state, illustrate and discuss. (See separate Tip Sheet for more on this.)
- 2. Outline and pre-plan your answer.** For this purpose, use plenty of scrap paper, save multiple documents with ideas and/or brainstorming and outlining. Pre-planning will help you to write an organized, rather than haphazard, answer.
- 3. Stick to the question.** Give the information you have that is directly relevant to the question and present it in an orderly way. Resist the temptation to write about something you know better instead.
- 4. Read the directions carefully.** Ask your professor questions if you do not fully understand the directions.
- 5. Read all questions carefully before answering any of them,** and make sure you clearly understand the question. Note key words such as name, describe, explain, compare, etc.
- 6. Manage your time well. Set a specific amount of time to work on your assignment.** Go back to it later (take a breather to clear your head and think more clearly) to review and revise.
- 7. Before you begin writing, prepare a short outline of the main points you intend to cover.** Spend some time organizing your material before you begin writing.

Organize your answer in three parts:

- Introduction
- Main Body
- Summary

In other words:

- Tell them what you're going to tell them
- Tell them
- Tell them what you told them

- 8. Follow any formatting guidelines your instructor has given you.** Make your papers professional in appearance.
- 9. Spell-check, edit and proofread.**

Keep in mind:

Do not repeat (even by using other words) what you have already said.

Do not digress into material that does not answer the question.

Do not use language that is too broad and general, if the question calls for specific detail.

Adapted and amended from <http://classweb.gmu.edu/WAC/somguide/templatewriting.htm>

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