

Following the Instructions

Before you start planning your paper, make sure that you understand its goal; before you start writing your paper, make sure that you respect its format. If you tend to procrastinate, prepare a writing calendar as soon as you receive the assignment instructions. By having smaller tasks to accomplish each week, you are more likely to have enough time to complete every step of the writing process.

Establish your priorities, especially when you have more than one paper to write.

- How much of your overall grade is awarded to the paper? How many points is it worth?
- What are the evaluation criteria? Do you have a checklist to follow?
- When is the paper due? Are there penalties for late submissions?

Goal

Plan your paper according to the type of paper that you must write and according to the topic that you must explore.

- Must you write an annotated bibliography, a critical review, an essay, a lab report, a literature review, an oral presentation, a research proposal, a summary, or another type of academic paper?
- Must you find your own topic, choose from a list of topics, or follow a given topic?
- How many sources are required?

Pay attention to the verbs that are used in the instructions.

- **Argumentation:** analyze, assess, debate, discuss, consider, evaluate, prove, reflect, show, etc.
- **Description:** classify, define, demonstrate, enumerate, explain, identify, illustrate, outline, show, etc.
- **Relation:** apply, compare, connect, contrast, differentiate, distinguish, link, relate, show, etc.

Format

Make a list of all the formatting requirements—these are easy points to collect.

- What is the length of the paper? (This is an important clue concerning the scope of the topic.)
- What are the professor's preferences regarding font, margins, and spacing?
- What are the professor's preferences regarding page numbers, headers, and headings?
- What is the expected format for the title page and bibliography?
- Which referencing style must you use?

To know more, see the *Purdue OWL*, *SPARK*, *Infosphère*, or similar writing centre websites.