

I'm Confused! What Does My Professor Really Want?

DO

- **Read over the instructor's prompt carefully.** If your instructor doesn't provide a prompt, email and ask!
- **Start EARLY** on your assignment and try to get the instructor's feedback on a draft. Also, [see one of the tutors in the Writing Center.](#)
- **Provide a title that tells your reader about your [stance](#)** and that helps to draw them into your paper: "Why I Love Curling" or "Banning Secondhand Smoke: The New Puritanism."
- **Follow the instructor's format instruction for font and spacing.** If none are given, use an easily readable [font](#), such as Times New Roman, and 12-point font.
- **Use signal phrases** and/or colons to introduce quotations, such as **According to George Will**, "Obama has become the standard bearer for a new socialism." (Ask for the Writing Center's handout on "[Integrating Sources](#)" and "[Integrating Quotations and In-text Citations.](#)")
- **Always meet at least the minimum requirements** of an assignment: page length, number of sources, etc.
- **Read your essay out loud before turning it in**—you will catch many errors and missing words when you do this.

DON'T

- **Give your essay a generic title** such as "Essay One" or "Research Paper" or "Stem Cell Research"
- **Use second person** in your papers. Circle all of the areas where you have used "you" or "your."
If you use first person (the pronouns "I" or "we"), make sure you have the professor's permission to do so.
- **Use slang** unless it is from quoted material.
- **Use conversational language.** Instead, use a [dictionary](#) or another [dictionary](#) and [thesaurus](#) to build your vocabulary.
- **Use too many rhetorical questions** (if you choose to use any at all!). It's your job to answer the questions you ask. You should not assume your audience already knows the answer.
- **Overuse semicolons.** A semicolon is a "California stop" and should only be used when the meaning of one sentence should "roll into" the next. Otherwise, use a period, subordination, or coordination.
- **Try to make your paper look longer than it is** by changing the font or the spacing. Professors know this trick immediately, and it annoys them!