

Interpreting Assignment Instructions

MSVU International Education Centre

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Reminder

**Today's session:
Is not recorded**

**PPT will be posted to
www.msvu.ca/international**



Presenter



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Outline

Today we will look at 4 strategies to understanding assignment instructions:

1. Analyzing the wording of the assignment
2. Noting the language being used
3. Using the course outline
4. Applying a rubric



Preview

Questions for the audience:

In the chat box:

1. How many courses are you taking this semester?
2. Do you have family or children living with you?
3. Do you have a job or other outside commitments?

*Outside of school, we are all busy in our own way.
Understanding assignment instructions helps you be more
efficient!*



Preview

Questions for the audience:

Any volunteers to turn on their microphone and talk about their process?

How do you approach an assignment?



Research says...

"If students don't have a clear idea in mind of what a task or assignment looks like when completed, then they will spend more time worrying about what to do rather than how to do it" (Schaelling, p. 3, 2018).



Research says...

According to research, students often misinterpret or simply do not understand assignment requirements, many times because they fail to read assignment instructions carefully. This results in missing key information or misjudging the difficulty of the assignment (Nelson, 1990).



Part I

1. Instructions



Instructions

1. Read the assignment instructions carefully

Why?

- The assignment may look simple or straightforward, but it still may take time and planning to complete
- You may be required to learn a new skill
- This early effort will save you time, problems, and stress later
- Do this well in advance

Instructions Cont'd

1. Read the assignment instructions carefully

Read actively (highlight, take notes) + analyze. Ask yourself:

- What is the purpose of this assignment, what do I need to do to respond correctly? Is there a central question I need to answer?
- What kind of assignment am I being asked to do? How much do I know about this kind of writing?
- Are there sub-questions I need to answer?
- Are there any plural nouns? Ex: factors, reasons, descriptions? (indicating the number of answers/reasons I must provide)
- What kind of evidence do I need to support my response? Class work or readings? Additional research?
- Are there different sections to the assignment?
- Are there additional requirements? Due date? Format? Word count?



Instructions Cont'd

Example 1:

UBP Fall 2012 Essay 1

Due Date: Tuesday, October 2nd, 2012

Value: 10% of your final mark

Assignment: Individually, write a 900-1000 word essay that compares and contrasts the values/ethics of the two companies assigned to your presentation group. Your paper must include:

1. A cover page
2. An introduction (2%), 3 body paragraphs (2% each), and a conclusion (2%)
3. A reference page

The information must be researched thoroughly using academic resources only. Please refer to the Rubric for evaluation criteria.

Due Date: Tuesday, October 2nd, 2012

Citations: Use academic references to support your information.



Instructions Cont'd

Example 2:

RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

ASSIGNMENT: Write a research paper in which you take a position on a topic of current interest (and approved by the instructor), related to your respective disciplines, and support it with information from authoritative sources. The topic you choose can be related to a topic you are working on for another class. Your discussion should be presented in standard essay form (i.e. with title, introduction, thesis statement, body, and conclusion).

LENGTH: Undergrad students-1000 words of text (approximately 4 pages), Masters Students – 1500 words of text (approximately 6 pages).

SOURCES: You will be required to cite a minimum of five sources, with at least four from academic books and journals.

FORMAT: The submitted copy must be typed, double-spaced, on 8" x 11" typing paper. Margins for text should be 1" on all sides. Include a cover sheet and header with your title and be sure to number your pages.

CITATIONS: Use the American Psychological Association (APA) style. Include a References page at the end of your paper. |

TOPIC SELECTION DATE: You must email me your topic by Thursday, October 9, 2008.

OUTLINE: An outline of your paper is due on Thursday, October 16, 2008. Your outline must include your thesis statement, main themes and references.

ESSAY BIBLIOGRAPHY: The beginning of class Thursday, October 23, 2008.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: The beginning of class Thursday, October 30, 2008.

NOVEMBER 6, FEEDBACK FOR FINAL PAPER/GROUP PRESENTATION

DUE DATE: The beginning of class on Wednesday, November 20, 2008.

LATE PAPERS: Late papers will be penalized one point for each day they are late.



Instructions Cont'd

Example 3:

Moodle Discussion Forums = 20% (5% each) (please see the GPP Course Calendar for specific dates and part 1 and 2 deadlines)

- Students will take part in 4 forum discussions posted to Moodle which will encourage students to communicate about and reflect critically on course topics, materials and learning outcomes as well as relevant issues.
- For each Discussion Forum, there will be two parts:
 - 1) the student must respond critically to at least 3 of the questions posted by the instructor before a specified part 1 deadline (worth 3 points). Simple responses such as, "I agree", are not acceptable. Comments/Opinions must be justified with supporting explanations and/or examples and written in complete grammatical sentences to receive full marks.
 - 2) the student must respond to at least two of their classmates' posts before a specified part 2 deadline (worth 2 points). Students must respond respectfully and critically to classmates (e.g., using polite language, explaining reasons why you agree or disagree, providing examples, making useful suggestions, asking a related question, etc.). Students should also respond to different classmates in each discussion forum, not the same classmates repeatedly. Detailed and grammatical replies are required to receive full marks.
- Each Moodle Discussion Forum will be marked as completed to satisfaction or incomplete based on the criteria above and late posts will not be marked after the specified deadlines.
- Feedback will be provided by the instructor through comments posted to the Moodle Discussion Forums and/or shared in live class in Collaborate.



2. Language



Language

Understand the verbs in assignment questions

When reading assignment instructions or questions, instruction verbs are the key to understanding and offering an appropriate and relevant answer. Instruction verbs can have varying functions:

1. Some instruction verbs ask you to **select** and **present** information:

Indicate	Summarize
Trace	Describe
List	Outline
Identify	State
Show	

Language

Verbs in assignment questions

2. Other verbs ask you to **explain** something to or **persuade** your readers of something:

Explain	Discuss
Define	Account for
Suggest	Put forward
Propose	Analyze
Investigate	

Language

Verbs in assignment questions

3. Another group of verbs relates to **comparison** and **classification**. These require you to work out relationships between different phenomena:

Compare	Contrast
Differentiate between	Classify
Categorize	Analyze
Match	Correlate
Measure	Separate

Language

Verbs in assignment questions

4. A small number of verbs relate to **time** (chronology), and are often associated with process and development:

Trace	Outline
Relate	Categorize
Chronicle	Narrate
Report	Record

Language

Verbs in assignment questions

5. The following verbs require you to **evaluate** something:

Evaluate	Assess
Measure	Estimate
Calculate	Comment on
Critique	Survey
Grade	Gauge

3. Course Outline



Course Outline

Pay attention to the course outline

Your course outline is everything your professor will cover but also what they require from you. Often general assignment expectations can be found there.

- Due dates and times
- Modes of submission – Moodle, email, paper
- Citation styles – APA, MLA, Nutrition Style, etc
- Additional conditions





Course Instructor: Sarah Jacques

Office: Seton Annex, office #105

Contact: sarah.jacques2@msvu.ca
902-457-5970

Course Schedule: September 9 - December 4, 2019

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30 - 10:30 IEC Classroom	8:30 - 10:30 IEC Classroom	8:30 - 10:30 IEC Classroom	8:30 - 10:30 IEC Classroom	9:00 - 1:00 Seton 305

* Instructor's Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30
(Book this time if you think you need extra help, outside of class)

Helpful Text:

- A Pocket Style Manual, 7th Edition, 2015, by Hacker & Sommers (in bookstore)

UBP Objectives:

- ~ Are my academic language skills strong enough for university?
- ~ Can I manage academic reading and writing tasks?
- ~ Can I understand assignment requirements and professors' expectations?
- ~ Do I know how to take class notes and prepare for tests?
- ~ Do I know how to find and use research appropriately, avoiding plagiarism?
- ~ Can I reflect, analyze, think critically and discuss global issues?

UBP Guidelines:

- ~ Use only English in class
- ~ Attend at least 80% of classes and complete all assignments
[2 days late = 1 day absent]
- ~ Complete and submit a tutor contract form for anyone who may help you during the course
- ~ Demonstrate understanding of plagiarism and its consequences at MSVU
- * See the MSVU homepage for more information

Course Assessment Total: 100%

In-class Writing Assignments (70% required on these to pass UBP)

Timed Writing #1 (Reflection on Presentation)	5%
Timed Writing #2 (Summary & Self-Reflection)	10%
Weekly Quizzes	15%
Final Exam	15%

Research Essay (70% required on this to pass UBP)

Research Essay (final essay only)	15%
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Other Assignments (75% required over all assignments to pass UBP)

Class Participation, Mount 101 & Independent Research Assignments	5%
Presentation #1 - Group: Study Skills	10%
Presentation #2 - Individual: Discipline-Specific (can be same topic as essay)	15%
Research Essay Preparation (outline, draft)	10%

Description of Assignments:

Class Participation, Mount 101 & Independent Research Assignments (IRA) = 5%

- a) **Participation** is a very important part of being a successful university student in Canada.
 - It includes completing homework, communicating in English, staying focused in class, avoiding the use of social media, using a unilingual (English-English) dictionary, answering questions, engaging in class discussions, and working collaboratively in groups.
- b) **Mount 101** is a required online course for every new undergraduate student.
 - You must complete your Mount 101 assignment each week. Then we will complete the Check-in Challenges together during certain Thursday classes with Marisha. You must get 70% on each Check-in Challenge to complete Mount 101.
- c) **IRA's** are posted on Moodle every Friday afternoon, and you must complete it before the next Friday's class.
 - The purpose of the IRA's is to strengthen your independent study and research skills.

Weekly Quizzes (each quiz = 5%) = 15%

- On 3 Thursdays throughout the term, you will write a UBP quiz at the start of class.
- The quizzes will cover the information learned in classes in the previous weeks, and they will all be noncumulative.
- **Sept 26, Oct 10, and Oct 24**

Timed Writing #1 (Reflection on Presentation) = 5%

- Write a reflection paper in class about your first presentation, within a designated time period. You should choose three of the most important things that you want to improve from your first presentation and explain the steps you will take to improve them.
- **Thursday, Sept 26 in Seton 316, 8:30 - 10:30 AM**

Timed Writing #2 (Summary & Self-Reflection) = 10%

- Write a summary paper in class, within a designated time period - You will be assigned an article, a video or an activity. As homework, you should read/watch/do the assigned article/video/activity and take notes on at least 3 of the main ideas; then you should think about *your personal* opinion/reaction to what you read/watched (do you agree or disagree and why) and how has the author affected your thoughts/opinion about the issue.
- **Thursday, Oct 31 in Seton 316, 8:30 - 10:30 AM**

4. Assignment Rubrics

—	✓	
—		✓

Rubrics

Read the rubric

A rubric is an assessment or evaluation tool your professor uses to score your assignment. It is made up of categories of criteria you will be evaluated on and points awarded for the quality of work.

The benefits of understanding the rubric:

- Clarify the purpose of the assignment
- Help students understand the assignment requirements
- Identify exactly how to score an “A”
- Reduce uncertainty
- Inspire motivation
- Equalize scoring – no bias



Rubrics

An example

GPP Fall 2019 Presentation Grading Rubric

Name: _____ Presentation Date: _____ Final Grade: /100 = /10%

	Emerging	Developing	Advanced	Grade
1. Organization (20 points)	Ideas may not be focused or developed; the main purpose is not clear. Presentation was either far shorter or longer than the allotted time.	Main idea is evident, but the organizational structure may need to be strengthened; ideas may not be clearly developed and the purpose is not clearly stated. Presentation was a little too long or short.	Ideas are clearly organized, developed, and supported to achieve a purpose; the purpose is clear. Timing of the presentation was nearly perfect.	/20
2. Topic Knowledge (20 points)	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about the subject. Few, if any, sources are cited.	Student has a partial grasp of the information and can answer some questions. Overdependence on notes may be observed. Some oral citations attempted, or an adequate number of references included.	Student has a clear grasp of information. Citations are sourced and relevant. Student answers all class questions effectively. Oral citations are included along with the required number of references.	/20
3. Language Use - Verbal Effectiveness (20 points)	Language choices may be limited, too complex, or too dull. Pronunciation may impede audience's understanding.	Language is appropriate, but word choices are not particularly vivid or precise. Speaking is clear for the most part.	Language choices are vivid and precise. Student speaks slowly and clearly. Pronunciation does not impede understanding.	/20
4. Delivery and Audience Adaptation - Nonverbal Effectiveness (20 points)	The delivery detracts from the message; eye contact may be very limited. Audience members have difficulty hearing the presentation and are not engaged.	The delivery generally seems effective – however, effective use of volume, eye contact, vocal control, etc. may not be consistent; some hesitancy may be observed.	Great delivery – natural, confident, and enhances the message –eye contact, volume, pace, etc. indicate confidence, a commitment to the topic, and a willingness to communicate.	/20
5. Use of visual aids (20 points)	Little use of visual aids, or use of aids is inappropriate. Does not assist audience in comprehension of topic. PowerPoint and/or handouts are full of errors and appear unedited.	Visual aids add an element to the presentation, but are not used appropriately. May be difficult to interpret or read. Citations on PowerPoint and/or handouts contain formatting errors, and some spelling mistakes appear in the text.	Excellent use of visual aids. Includes use of more than one visual aid (handouts, props and/or realia) in addition to PowerPoint. PowerPoint/Handout citations are formatted correctly, and spelling mistakes are rare.	/20

5. Recap



Recap

1. Analyze the assignment instructions carefully:
 - Unpack what you're being asked to do
 - Have a clear idea before you begin
2. Note the language – Instruction Verbs
 - Narrow your focus
 - Key to writing an appropriate response
3. Read your course outline
 - Offers overarching information regarding assignment
 - Due dates, number count, citation style, submission method, etc
4. Refer to the rubric
 - Clarify the purpose of the assignment
 - Inspires motivation



To review this presentation

www.msvu.ca/international

International Education Centre



The International Education Centre (IEC) at MSVU offers personal, academic, cultural and immigration advising to international students in Canada, as well as any student or faculty wishing to study, research or conduct projects abroad. The IEC is also home to the University's English for Academic Purposes programs.

TRAVELING TO CANADA: COVID-19 REQUIREMENTS

Information on these pages reflect the travel and quarantine regulations beginning January 15, 2022.

MSVU international students are no longer required to have their quarantine plans approved by the International Education Centre. However, you are still required to have a quarantine plan to enter Canada. Please continue to check this website as it will help you create your own quarantine plan and will prepare you for your travel to Canada.

If you need further support, please email international@msvu.ca.



ONLINE SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SUMMER 2022

We gathered a number of online support webinars and workshops that will help you in your transition to Canada. The list is a combination of academic and student life support services and information. Please continue to visit this page as we are continuously adding to the list.

Click on the link above to access these resources. For more questions, email us at international@msvu.ca.



Thank You!
Questions?

Feedback Form:

<https://forms.office.com/r/zKQM8aqUGs>



References

Nelson, J. (1990). This was an easy assignment: Examining how students interpret academic writing tasks. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 24(4), 362-396.

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