

# Essay Writing: Getting Started

## Analyzing Assignments

The first step to completing your assignment is to analyze and understand the assignment itself. These are some of the things you should understand and think about.

<b>Requirements</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> It needs to be _____ ( <i>pages/words</i> ). <input type="checkbox"/> It is due _____ ( <i>date</i> ). <input type="checkbox"/> It needs to be documented in _____ referencing style ( <i>e.g., APA, ASA, MLA</i> ).
<b>Choice</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The topic for my essay is _____. <input type="checkbox"/> Ways I might approach the topic are _____ _____
<b>Understanding of Content</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Key words in the assignment description that relate to specific course concepts are _____ _____
<b>Purpose</b>	Reasons why I think I am doing this assignment: <input type="checkbox"/> To practice researching articles on the database. <input type="checkbox"/> To practice university essay writing and referencing (in-text citation including paraphrasing, formatting and references list etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> To understand existing research on a course concept. <input type="checkbox"/> To apply a course concept to a current situation, issue, or human behaviour. <input type="checkbox"/> Other? _____
<b>Organization</b>	Elements that I need to include in my essay: <input type="checkbox"/> Title page <input type="checkbox"/> Abstract <input type="checkbox"/> Introduction <input type="checkbox"/> Thesis statement (or statement of purpose) <input type="checkbox"/> Headings <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraphs, including supporting research with in-text citations <input type="checkbox"/> Conclusion <input type="checkbox"/> References <input type="checkbox"/> Other? _____
<b>Sources</b>	I am required to cite a minimum of _____ sources. ( <i>number</i> ) Sources I can use: <input type="checkbox"/> Google Scholar <input type="checkbox"/> Peer-Reviewed articles Library Database Others? _____ Check with your instructor. Review the Research Guide for your program: <a href="https://brocku.ca/library/help/research-guides/">https://brocku.ca/library/help/research-guides/</a>



## Narrowing a Topic

### Rule of 3

1. Brainstorm three things that you can say about your topic.
2. Continue to break your ideas down by threes. You don't have to break down EVERY idea. Break down ideas that interest you until you've found an area of focus.

### Free Writing

1. Free-write on the assignment or general topic for 5 to 10 minutes non-stop. Include all your ideas
2. Look back over what you have written and highlight the most prominent and interesting ideas. Repeat the exercise with a tighter focus. You'll narrow your topic and generate several points about the topic in the process.

## Thesis Statement

### 1. Start with a topic

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Check for an argument: Topic + Overall Finding/Argument

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Add your reasons or explanations: Topic + Overall Finding/Argument + **Reason(s) or Explanation(s)**

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. If desired rearrange the wording to suit your preference. Make sure that all three elements of the thesis statement are still there.

### Test your Thesis Statement

Rampolla, M. (2010). A Pocket Guide to Writing in History. 6th edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 46

#### It's a Thesis

- ✓ Suggests an answer to a question you have posed as a result of your reading
  - *and*
- ✓ Is specific, rather than general
  - *and*
- ✓ Is debatable (that is, it asserts a conclusion with which a reader might disagree)
  - *and*
- ✓ Can be supported by evidence from the sources

#### It's NOT a thesis

- × Your proposed thesis does no more than repeat the topic you are writing
- × Your proposed thesis poses a question without suggesting an answer
- × Your proposed thesis merely states a fact or a series of facts
- × Your proposed thesis simply reflects a personal belief or preference



## Understanding key words and expectations

Assignment descriptions often have keywords that indicate what you are supposed to do. Below is a list of frequently used assignment keywords and their corresponding expectations.

If the assignment says...	Then...
<b>Prove</b>	Use factual evidence and logic to prove a claim (e.g., a position on an issue, your point of view on a topic, or the truth of a subject).
<b>Outline</b>	Show the stages of development of a topic (e.g., issue, event, process) using organized categories of points and sub-points.
<b>Illustrate</b>	Show and clarify the characteristics of a subject using an example or examples.
<b>Criticize or Evaluate</b>	Evaluate or critique the subject based on a clear set of criteria. Develop the criteria and determine whether elements of the subject meet the criteria.
<b>Classify</b>	Break down the subject into categories (e.g., into types, methods)
<b>Analyze</b>	Examine a subject in detail. Break the subject down into its main parts. Then, identify and examine each part. Finally, explain how the parts relate to each other and to the subject as a whole.
<b>Compare or Contrast</b>	Find similarities and differences between two items. When asked to compare, focus on their similarities. When asked to contrast, focus on their differences.
<b>Discuss or Examine</b>	Clarify the elements or characteristics of a subject (e.g., issue, event, process). Do more than summarize. Make an observation or explore the implications
<b>Define</b>	Explain what makes the subject what it is. How is it different from, or the same as, other members of its class? Identify and describe the different elements or characteristics of the subject (usually using research sources).

