

## taking control over an assignment

The skillful writer learns how to shift ownership of an assigned piece of writing from the instructor to the writer.

1. Read the assignment over several times to make sure what is expected of you; if it is given orally, write it out completely. Make sure you understand the purpose of the assignment—not just what is expected of you, but WHY. This can help clarify the reason for the assignment, which will increase your engagement with it.
2. If you do not understand the assignment, ask the instructor to explain what is not clear to you. Be as specific as possible with your questions, as doing so will allow the instructor to consider them more seriously. And, ideally, conduct this communication through email, as it will allow for more thoughtful questions and responses. To improve your understanding of what is expected, you might even ask the instructor to show you a model student paper.
3. Once the assignment is clear, leave it. Your mind has already started working on it, making connections with what you know from experience and from what you have read. Just let the assignment increase your awareness of the issues raised in it.
4. Become an authority on the subject by taking advantage of what you already know, by researching, by thinking, by brainstorming, and by thinking through writing—by freewriting the first draft.
5. View the assignment from your own perspective. We too often look at assignments from a position of weakness, saying to ourselves that we know nothing about the topic, which is rarely true. You must still prepare by reading the assigned texts, but you should even go beyond this. Look at the assignment from a point of strength. Think about what you already know that can help you CONNECT with the subject. For example, if you are writing about social services for elderly clients, try to include any experience you have had in the field, or your family's guilt over sending a family member to a nursing home. Such information can help give you an approach to the paper or to document a point in the final draft.
6. Limit the subject as much as you can while maintaining the conditions set by the instructor. This allows you to make the assignment your own and develop the subject properly.
7. Finally, respond first to the questions you feel most confident addressing, those you know most about. Doing this will stimulate your thinking and enhance your confidence. You're now connecting with the assignment, making associations among the issues; you're building your paper, working your way through the questions. You're engaged, and your ideas are flowing. The more problematic questions are now within reach.