

Tips for Responding to a Writing Prompt

Responding to a writing prompt can be confusing and difficult. The two main things to consider are: *understanding the prompt* and *responding to the prompt*.

Understanding the Prompt

- R** – Read the prompt carefully
- U** – Underline key words
- R** – Restate the prompt in your own words

Read

Read the prompt slowly and carefully. Do not skim. Take time to understand and analyze the prompt. Prompts are typically brief, but they are full of information you will need to be able to respond to them.

Underline

Underline key words in the prompt. Look for main ideas, but also look for clues regarding what type of response the prompt seeks to elicit. Pay attention to words and phrases that indicate number: give one example; list some experiences; identify three goals. Look for detail words like “experience, goal, observation,” because they tell you what to include in your response. Also understand the types of verbs used in the prompt, because they are guides to the types of responses the prompt requires.

<i>Type of Essay</i>	<i>Verbs to Look for</i>
<i>Expository</i> (an essay that explains an idea based on facts)	Explain, define, classify, analyze, identify compare/contrast, cause/effect
<i>Narrative</i> (an essay that tells a story, usually based on personal experience)	Describe, tell
<i>Persuasive</i> (an essay intended to convince readers of something)	Convince, give an opinion, choose a point of view, argue, persuade

Restate

Restate the prompt in your words. Think of this step as explaining the prompt to someone who does not have the benefit of reading the prompt. If you can do this, then you most likely understand what the prompt is asking you to do.

Responding to the Prompt

- R** – Respond to the prompt
- O** – Organization
- D** – Development and details
- E** – Edit

Respond

Make sure to answer whatever the prompt is asking. Most people who do poorly when responding to prompts do so because they haven't answered the questions. Look at what you have underlined, and make sure you have included everything.

Organization

Take time to organize your ideas before you begin writing. While you may feel you don't have time to organize your thoughts, having a plan for writing will save you time.

- Brainstorm your ideas: Use an idea map/mind web or a bulleted list.
- Choose a main idea: Have a thesis.
- Outline your ideas: Determine in what order you should present your ideas.

Development and details

Start writing! Follow your outline and add appropriate details to develop your idea. Look back to your brainstorming notes and refer back to the prompt.

Edit

Even though time might be scarce, you still need to revise and edit your work. Reread your essay three times.

- Read for understanding. Does my essay answer the questions posed by the prompt? Does it make sense? Have I included sufficient detail and evidence to support my thesis? Make any necessary changes.
- Read with a fine-toothed comb. Check for spelling and punctuation errors. Check for subject-verb agreement. Check the overall grammar and mechanics of your work. Make any necessary changes.
- Read for finality. Take one last look at your essay to make sure that it is as clear as it can be. Once you've done this, move on. Don't obsess over it; it just wastes time.

Resources

Time4Writing. (2014). Understanding writing prompts. Retrieved from <http://www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/understanding-writing-prompts>

Wells, J. (2009). Understanding the prompt. (A. Brizee, Ed.). Retrieved from <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/2/2/52/>

Writing to a prompt (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.cobbk12.org/Acworth/Documents/RUPR%20Lessons.pdf>