Addressing the Prompt:

Learning how to address the prompt is an important skill to develop. Addressing the prompt means more than just reading it. It requires learning how to breakdown the prompt to fully understand it. Many writing assignments often start with a writing prompt. The prompt is a set of instructions designed to help guide students on what to write about and how to write about it. In order to write a paper that meets the professor's expectations, you must address the prompt.

This Handout Will:

- Explain six steps for addressing a writing prompt
- Address various sample writing prompts throughout
- Provide a sample prompt for practice

Here is an overview of the steps for how to address the prompt.

1. Read the prompt carefully
2. Identify key terms or concepts that need to be defined
3. Mark parts that are unclear or important
4. Annotate the prompt for any part that is unclear or important
5. Restate the writing prompt in your own words
6. Rank the directions from the prompt into a check list to address

1. How to Read the Prompt:
   - Read through the prompt carefully as it represents the professor's directions
   - Reread through the prompt and keep these questions in mind as you read:
     - What key verbs such as "explain" or "analyze" or "discuss" are being used?
     - Is there specific topic(s) or question(s) that must be addressed
     - What sources are you working with?
     - What limitations do you have, especially in terms of space and format?

2. How to Identify Key Terms in the Prompt:
   - Identify and translate key verbs such as "analyze, evaluate, compare and contrast" to make sure you understand what the task of the paper will be
   - Search for important concepts that will need to be addressed
   - For unclear concepts, look them up or ask the professor
   - Look for bolded or capitalized words or sentences by the professor and pay special attention to what is highlighted
3. How to Mark the Prompt:
   - Mark terms that need to be defined in the paper for a reader
   - Mark terms and sentences that provide specific writing instructions
   - Markup areas of the prompt that will be relevant throughout the writing process, such as the citation and reference style that must be used
   - Mark any words or sentences that are unclear or confusing to look up or ask the professor about

4. How to Annotate the Prompt:
   - Write comments or questions that come up as you read through the prompt
   - Make them clear as this will help you keep track of your thoughts
   - Highlight or make notes for areas that you will need to go back and think critically about

5. How to Restate the Prompt:
   - Use your own words to summarize the prompt in a concise way
   - Keep the ideas and overall purpose of the prompt
   - Don't simply summarize each line but try to boil down what the central ideas of the prompt are
   - This should help to make the prompt clearer and easier to understand
   - This should also help you remember the requirements of the prompt during the writing process

6. How to Rank the Prompt:
   - Think of this as a checklist that will be referred back to throughout the writing process
   - Any questions in the prompt that refer to key ideas should be given priority
   - Any key words that need to be discussed should also be given high priority
   - Instructions related to content should be prioritized over format guidelines
   - Remember to rank in order of what should be addressed early on to what should be addressed at the end
   - This means focusing on important areas such as formulating a strong thesis while addressing format guidelines such as double spacing at the end
Campus Academic Resource Program
Addressing the Prompt

Example A: Identifying the Prompt

"Explain Darwin's idea of natural selection in his theory of evolution"

Notice that this prompt is only one sentence. Prompts can sometimes come with few parameters and guidelines. When you come across these kinds of prompts, key terms should still be identified. Notice the key verb here would be "explain" and the key concepts to understand would be "natural selection" and "evolution." Identifying these key words will help you better address the prompt.

Example B: Marking and Annotating the Prompt

"In 1971, President Nixon ended the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates by suspending the United States’ obligations to convert dollars into gold. This would eventually lead to the establishment of a floating exchange rate system. Analyze the causes behind President Nixon's decision to end gold convertibility and the Bretton Woods system that had been in place since 1944. Use Fred Block’s book, Origins of International Economic Disorder, for evidence in the paper and cite all sources using the Chicago style."

Notice that this prompt is more complex and needs to be marked up to be properly addressed. After breaking down the prompt, here is what it should look like.

"In 1971, President Nixon ended the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates by suspending the United States’ obligations to convert dollars into gold. This would eventually lead to the establishment of a floating exchange rate system. Analyze the causes behind President Nixon's decision to end gold convertibility and the Bretton Woods system that had been in place since 1944. Use Fred Block’s book, Origins of International Economic Disorder, for evidence in the paper and cite all sources using the Chicago style."

Notice that breaking down the prompt will reveal important or difficult areas that you should be addressing for yourself and your reader in the paper.

Example C: Restating the Prompt

Recently, the National Basketball Association (NBA) has considered raising the age limit for players to be eligible to play in the league. This has revived debates about when players should be allowed to play in the NBA. Proponents of an age limit argue that it will prevent high school graduates who are not ready for professional basketball to have more time to mature in a college program and get a better education. Opponents of the age limit argue that the rule prevents NBA-ready players from being compensated for their talents and forces them to languish in a college
program. Write an essay in which you take a position on the pros and cons of the NBA’s age limit for basketball players coming out of high school. Provide evidence to support your position. The paper should be at least 5 pages and use double spaced, one inch margins with MLA format. Be sure to address counter arguments to your position. Late papers will not be accepted. Please proofread diligently as errors will result in a lower grade.

After considering what the central ideas of the prompt are, here is the restated version:

Argue for whether the advantages of the NBA’s age limit outweigh the disadvantages. Use examples to illustrate your points and address counter arguments. A minimum of 5 pages with double spacing, one inch margins and MLA style is required. No late papers and proofread carefully.

The restated version is easier to refer back to when needed and the process of boiling everything down will help attune you to the central ideas from the prompt that should be addressed in the paper.

Example C: Ranking the Prompt

However, since this prompt is very dense, it can be broken down further into a checklist.

A. Start early as late papers will not be tolerated
B. Take a position on the NBA’s age limit
C. Consider examples to support your position
D. Consider the opposite position and address it
E. Use MLA style to cite and reference all sources
F. Proofread and do it carefully
G. Make sure the essay is at least 5 pages
H. Make sure the essay is double spaced with one inch margins

Notice that creating a checklist also helps to breakdown the instructions in the prompt into smaller and more manageable parts that can be worked in different sessions.
"In the fictional universe of *The Hunger Games*, Panem is a nation consisting of the capitol and 12 districts that provide precious resources to the capitol. The hunger games help to serve a number of purposes in preserving the political order in Panem. Discuss the role of the hunger games and how it is a form of political control by the capitol over the districts. Draw on evidence from the movie or the book to support your claims. This assignment should be no more than 4 pages long and all citations and references should be done in MLA format. Please use 1.5 inch margins and double spacing. Late papers will lose a full grade for each day late."

**Read and Identify Key Terms**
Bibliography

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