Understanding the Assignment
Follow these steps to ensure you understand the assignment:

1. Keep a copy of the instructions for the assignment on hand
2. Read over the instructions carefully
3. Ask your instructor questions
4. Ask your classmates questions
5. Find out what your instructor expects in the paper
6. Make a to-do list of the steps you will take to complete the assignment
Keep a copy of the instructions for the assignment on hand

- When your instructor assigns the paper, write down all details he/she gives the class. For example: due date, format, number of pages/words, purpose of paper, specific instructions.

- The instructor may distribute a hand-out. In this case, keep the hand-out in a safe, easily accessible place.

- If you take notes on an electronic device, save the instructions on both the electronic device and a flash drive. Also, email them to yourself for easy access later.
2. Read over the instructions carefully

- Read the instructions several times.
- Highlight or underline information the instructor emphasizes.
- Take note of and circle any part of the instructions that either you do not understand or you have questions about.
- If you have any additional questions, write these down on the page.
Ask your instructor questions

- Asking question during class helps both you and your classmates. They may have the same questions you have.
- If you are uncomfortable asking questions during class, approach your instructor either before or after class.
- You can also visit your instructor during his/her office hours, send him/her an email, or call him/her on the phone.
- Even if you understand the assignment, still ask questions. You will learn more about the assignment and what your instructor expects.
Ask your classmates questions

- Pay attention to which students appear knowledgeable, responsible, and taking the class seriously.
- Ask these students about the steps they plan to take in completing the assignment.
- If you like, set up a study group with these students. You can work together to help answer each others’ questions.
- Avoid asking help from students who goof off and do not take the class seriously. They could give you wrong information and influence you to be lazy about your assignment.
Find out about your instructor’s expectations

- If you know any students who have taken classes from your instructor, ask them questions about what your instructor likes and does not like in a paper.

- Visit your instructor’s faculty webpage. You may find out what types of papers your instructor likes.

- Ask your instructor about past papers that he/she liked or didn’t like.

- Ask your instructor what types of papers earn an “A”.

Make a to-do list of the steps you will take to complete the assignment

- Make a list of what you can accomplish each day on the assignment until the day it is due.
- Spread the work out evenly so that you are not overloaded with work at any one time.
- Do not leave all of the work until the night before the assignment is due.
Example

Your instructor gives you the following assignment:

“Write a paper comparing and contrasting the settings in “A Rose for Emily” and “The Open Boat”.

What is the first thing you would do to understand this assignment?
First, type or write out the instructions and keep it in a safe place.

Read over the instructions. You can see that there are many questions that need to be answered before you can start on it.

Circle key words. For example:

“Write a paper comparing and contrasting the settings in “A Rose for Emily” and “The Open Boat”.

You now know:
- The purpose of the paper is to compare and contrast
- The subject of the paper is the settings in “A Rose for Emily” and “The Open Boat”

There are still a lot of questions that need to be answered.
Ask your instructor questions like:

- “When is the due date?”
- “How do I write a compare and contrast essay?”
- “What is the difference between a compare and contrast essay and the book reports I wrote in high school?”
- “How many pages or words should the paper be?”
- “What format should I write it in? MLA? APA?”
- “Should I use any outside sources?”
- “How do I cite these sources?”
- “Do you want a cover page?”
Now find some serious and responsible classmates and form a study group to help answer questions you may have along the way.

Research into what type of paper your instructor considers an “A” paper. If you keep to those standards in your paper, you have a better chance of getting an “A” as well.

Make a to-do list on what you want to accomplish each day until the due date and stick to it.