



# The Writing Center



## I'm Confused! What Does My Professor Really Want?

### DO

- **Read over the instructor's prompt carefully.** If your instructor doesn't provide a prompt, email and ask!
- **Start EARLY** on your assignment and try to get the instructor's feedback on a draft. Also, [see one of the tutors in the Writing Center.](#)
- **Provide a title that tells your reader about your stance** and that helps to draw them into your paper: "Why I Love Curling" or "Banning Secondhand Smoke: The New Puritanism."
- **Follow the instructor's format instruction for font and spacing.** If none are given, use an easily readable [font](#), such as Times New Roman, and 12-point font.
- **Use signal phrases** and/or colons to introduce quotations, such as **According to George Will**, "Obama has become the standard bearer for a new socialism." (Ask for the Writing Center's handout on "[Integrating Sources](#)" and "[Integrating Quotations and In-text Citations.](#)")
- **Always meet at least the minimum requirements** of an assignment: page length, number of sources, etc.
- **Read your essay out loud before turning it in**—you will catch many errors and missing words when you do this.

### DON'T

- **Give your essay a generic title** such as "Essay One" or "Research Paper" or "Stem Cell Research"
- **Use second person** in your papers. Circle all of the areas where you have used "you" or "your."  
*If you use first person (the pronouns "I" or "we"), make sure you have the professor's permission to do so.*
- **Use slang** unless it is from quoted material.
- **Use conversational language.** Instead, use a [dictionary](#) or another [dictionary](#) and [thesaurus](#) to build your vocabulary.
- **Use too many rhetorical questions** (if you choose to use any at all!). It's your job to answer the questions you ask. You should not assume your audience already knows the answer.
- **Overuse semicolons.** A semicolon is a "California stop" and should only be used when the meaning of one sentence should "roll into" the next. Otherwise, use a period, subordination, or coordination.
- **Try to make your paper look longer than it is** by changing the font or the spacing. Professors know this trick immediately, and it annoys them!