* **Understanding**

Use this handout before you begin brainstorming. It will encourage you to think strategically about your prompt, so you can envision a potential thesis and manage your time as you begin drafting.

* + **Your** 
    - **Assignment**

1. Re-read the assignment, paying particular attention to the writing task. (For courses in the Writing Program, this often takes the form of a boldfaced question.)
2. Does this assignment require you to define or understand key terms? Perhaps the prompt refers to something broad and abstract, such as “ideology,” “sustainability,” “education,” or “the media.” Perhaps the prompt refers to something highly specific, such as “superheroes,” “armed conflict,” or “single-payer health insurance.” List all of the terms you’ll need to define explicitly or understand implicitly in order to write your paper.

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1. What is your working definition of the terms you’ve just listed? Take the time to complete this step, even if the answers feel obvious to you. Many of us *feel* that we understand key terms: take the concept of “culture,” for instance. But when pushed to define such concepts (what *is* culture?), it can surprisingly difficult to put our thoughts into words.

(over)

1. Does this assignment ask you to take a position on a controversial subject? If so, list as many divergent views as you can recall. Remember that when it comes to complex conflicts, there are usually more than two sides.
2. Now, take a moment to reread the background information on the prompt sheet (if any has been provided), as well as any tips your instructor may have supplied. Take a moment to think: why has the instructor assigned this writing task? In what way does the prompt ask you to think beyond the immediate topic to consider larger issues, problems, or opportunities? What does your instructor want you to be thinking about, beyond the immediate writing task?

1. Who is the audience for this paper, aside from your instructor? What sort of knowledge about the topic do you assume your audience has?

1. What type of information does this paper require? Will the information primarily be drawn from readings you were provided in class? Research you will conduct independently? Personal experience and opinion? List as many different evidence “pools” as you can.

Read through the following list and determine how many of these tasks you still need to accomplish. As you work through this list, please explore other handouts provided by the Writing Center, such as our guide on developing a Points-to-Make List.

* Review notes and readings/speak to the professor in order to develop a better understanding of key terms.
* Settle on a topic or central example for the paper.
* Spend time reviewing or examining central topic (re-reading or re-viewing, if applicable, jotting down details, etc.)
* Engage in some invention strategies (see additional handouts) to develop more ideas about topic/central example.
* Write a points-to-make list (see additional handout)
* Write a provisional thesis
* Make a rough plan
* Begin rough draft