Reviewing Assignment Instructions

To save time and get organized, it is vitally important use these steps before you begin writing your paper.

(This guide works in conjunction with the Section Heading Outline Quick Guide and worksheet. Download those here: http://libguides.usc.edu/SOWKlearningsupport/prewriting)

**Step 1: Review the assignment guidelines and identify the purpose**

- **Print** out assignment guidelines and **read** the guidelines carefully at least three times.
- **Circle** any words that instruct you to **do** something (ex: describe, analyze).
- **Look up** words you do not know and define on your assignment guidelines.
- **Identify the primary purpose** of your assignment and **underline** it. Look for sentences that indicate the **purpose**, **goals** and **expectations** of the paper.
- **Rephrase the purpose** in your own words and write it at the top of your guidelines.

**Step 2: Determine specific tasks to complete before you begin writing**

Identifying specific tasks will allow you to estimate how much time you will need before you begin writing the paper. This simple activity will improve time management.

- **Underline each task** listed in the assignment guidelines.
  
  Examples: 1) Research academic articles 2) Conduct interviews 3) Review casework 4) Complete program evaluations

- **Estimate the time** you will you need for each activity and write it by the underlined task.

**Step 3: Determine your headings and subheadings**

Use headings and subheadings to help you stay on track and to make reviewing your paper easier for your professor. (For formatting examples, see our “APA Template Paper” at http://libguides.usc.edu/SOWKlearningsupport/APA)

- **Bullet-points or roman numerals** often signify main topics in assignment guidelines. Each may be a **main topic** and **new section** in your paper.

- **Format main topics** as first level headings and smaller, sub-topics as second-level headings (also called sub-headings).

- **Topics listed under sub-bullet-points** or numbered subsections may be second-level headings.

- **List all of your first and second level headings** in the order of the assignment instructions to create a **section heading outline** and begin creating the paper structure! (For more information on section heading outlines, download the Quick Guide and worksheet about the topic here: http://libguides.usc.edu/SOWKlearningsupport/prewriting)
Step 4: Identify required course content

- Directly on your guidelines assignment guidelines, identify the required course concepts, theories, interventions, or other topics you'll need to know in order to complete this assignment. Highlight these concepts and pieces of information, and then copy the names of them to the appropriate part of your section heading outline.
- Use an academic source to define course concepts, theories, and other topics that you plan to use, then add them to the section heading outline. Remember to also create an APA citation for each definition—be sure to type out this citation direction onto your outline.

Step 5: Estimate the page length for each section

Estimating section length will help you budget your time and avoid exceeding page limits.

- Budget 1/3 to 1/2 page each for an introduction and conclusion, both of which are required for every APA style paper, unless your professor or the guidelines say they are not.
- Use the page limits from the guidelines to help you estimate the length of each section of your paper before you begin to write. Divide the maximum page length by the number of sections. Remember to budget room for the introduction and conclusion paragraphs, too.

Example: You have a 10-12 page paper with 4 main sections. The page limit (12) ÷ by the number of sections (4) = about 3 pages per section.

- Write your estimated page length next to each section and subsection in your outline.
- As you write, some sections may require more content than others and will therefore require more space than you had initially imagined. Make adjustments as necessary.

Step 6: Review these final questions...

- How many scholarly sources? Always use at least the minimum required and make sure you use appropriate, reliable, and recent sources (less than 10 years old).
- Adjustments to APA format? Follow all instructions, even if they are not standard APA.
- Paper’s due date? Add it to your calendar, plan out your time, and don’t be late.

After completing these 6 steps, you will have:

- A copy of your guidelines with important information underlined, highlighted, circled, or defined.
- A list of the tasks you must complete before you begin writing your paper.
- A section heading outline for your paper that includes your headings and subheadings as well as estimates of their length.
- Relevant course concepts and their definitions (with APA citations) under each heading.