

Uncovering Assumptions

In advanced classes, expectations of the field or discipline are likely to underlie those of your instructor. Here, your ingenuity is engaged not in the creation of an analytical approach or a method of investigation but in its application to your particular text, project, or research question. For example, your literature essay will probably rely on a close reading of a novel, poem, or play and take an accepted approach to analyzing the work's characters, images, or other components. Your essay is unlikely to use headings such as Method, Results, or Discussion. However, those divisions are likely essentials for your psychology report on your field study. Such expectations about approach, method, organization, or format reflect the assumptions shared by scholars and researchers in a particular field—their deep agreements, for instance, that a literary study typically relies on textual analysis or that a psychology study typically follows certain research procedures.

When a field or approach is new to you, you won't know if your instructor and others in the field already share established ideas about how a paper should develop. How can you find out what is assumed? First, use your experience as a college writer to check your assignment for clues—such as references, maybe without explanation, to a certain type of paper.

*Maybe quotations?
Repeated images?
Characters? Setting?
Narrator?*

*Relevance for society?
Cultural commentary?*

*What's that? What's
in it? Find sources??
Summarize? Or
synthesize too?*

*Last ten years?
Background OK?*

Using textual evidence, write an essay to analyze the novel's attention to problems of social justice.

*OK Thesis?
Evidence?*

*Break into
elements?
Identify
components?*

Prepare a review of the literature on your topic, covering advances during the last decade.

*New studies?
New findings?
New theories?*