

Task Definition

If you recall from the Big6 Skills research process, there are six steps, the first of which is *task definition*.

Task Definition means “to be sure about the job you have to do.” It is where you: 1.) Define your information problem; 2.) Identify the information needed to solve the information problem.

To be successful at this step, you should be able to:

- Understand the nature or type of assignment your teacher is asking you to complete.
- Narrow the scope of your information problem by narrowing your topic.
- Determine EXACTLY what you are expected to do. o Envision what the end product will look like.
- Know how you will be graded.
- Estimate how much time and effort will be required of you to complete the assignment.
- Consider how much information will be needed for your assignment.
- Determine the types of information you will need to seek out.

Most teachers and professors hand out assignment papers or post their assignment requirements online. READ this information carefully. It will answer many of the questions you should answer in the task definition stage.

For example, the instructions should tell you what kind of final product you will be presenting to the teacher. Is it a written report? An oral presentation? A poster? A digital video? Something else? The instructions should also give the length or duration of the assignment, such as 10 pages; 5 minute video; etc.

Your instructions may or may not tell you the topic of your paper. In some cases, your teacher or professor may assign a very broad topic and ask you to complete your research on “some aspect” of that topic. In other words – NARROW the topic. They should also state if you need to create a thesis. Since constructing and presenting a thesis is almost always part of your grade when it is included in a research assignment, you should make sure if one is required. Make sure you are aware of what is required for citing the sources you use. You should know which format your teacher or professor requires - MLA, APA, Harvard, etc.

Task definition also means knowing when your assignment (or parts of your assignment) is due. Write down in your study planner or organizer ALL of the due dates. For example, the dates notes are due; the date you must turn in the rough draft; and so on.

Once you understand the instructions for your assignment, you are ready to start looking for information. This doesn’t mean running right to the library and checking out library books. If you recall, this is where you start your presearch. Your presearch will help you recognize ways to narrow down a broad topic by allowing you to learn about different aspects of your topic. You are defining your topic, as well as your information task.

Task definition also includes developing your research questions and/or thesis. These activities are part of task definition because developing research questions and a thesis become your research strategies. They will help to guide your inquiry.

Once you've completed your presearch, and defined and narrowed your topic and developed research questions and/or a thesis, the next step in task definition is identify the keywords and phrases associated with and related to your topic by looking at your topic, research questions, and/or thesis. It's these keywords and phrases that will later guide you to your information.

Finally, task definition is understanding and identifying what type of information you need to complete your assigned task. Do you need maps? Pictures? Biographical information? Statistics? Primary sources?