

Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Score 1
Rubric Category	Organization
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Score 1
Rubric Category	Development
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Score 1
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1a, W1b
Argument Type	All arguments

Attacking the Prompt

Students review an essay's claims in order to ensure that they are maintaining focus on the assigned topic, prompt, or question.

Understanding the Expectations

One of the most important aspects of a successful piece of academic writing is making sure that the main claim of the essay matches up to the prompt, question, or topic that was assigned. Even if an essay is interesting and written well, it won't be truly successful if it doesn't do the job it was asked to do.

That means, as part of the writing and revision process, you need to check at multiple stages that your essay is staying focused on answering and exploring the question it was asked, and it means you need to understand the question and its implications very, very clearly.

It is always a good idea to take a careful look at the prompt before you begin writing, but you also may want to check at later stages in the writing process or after you receive feedback that your essay is not focused enough on the assigned topic.

First, ensure you understand the prompt by asking these questions:

- What are the key concepts and ideas in the prompt?
 - » Highlight the important words or phrases.
- Are there any words in the prompt that I don't really understand?
 - » For words you aren't completely sure of, try looking them up in the dictionary, especially if you highlighted them as important.
- What is the prompt asking me to do?
 - » After highlighting important words and looking up anything you don't understand, try writing the prompt in your own words.

Then, compare your version of the prompt to the claim you have created—or are creating—to make sure your essay is doing the job it was asked to do. If you get stuck anywhere in the process, try asking your teacher or another student for help.

Playing the “Attack the Prompt” Game

1. If you are working on a full draft, you can use your main claim for this game. If you are early in the writing process, all you need is the prompt and any notes or ideas that you have so far.
2. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and make three columns. Label one “Prompt” one, the next one “Questions and Definitions,” and the third one “My Version.”
3. Either on your own or with a group, fill in the “Prompt” column with the prompt or question for the essay. Then, highlight or underline the words that seem important or complicated.

Your notes should look something like this:

Prompt	Definitions and Questions	My Version
Why do characters in this novel <u>overwhelmingly</u> seek out power and other <u>trappings</u> of <u>authority</u> instead of doing what is right for each other?		

- In the “Definitions and Questions” column, put any important words you don’t feel you truly understand and add their definitions from the dictionary. Also in that column, ask any questions you have about the confusing parts of the prompt.

Now, your notes should look something like this:

Prompt	Definitions and Questions	My Version
Why do characters in this novel <u>overwhelmingly</u> seek out power and other <u>trappings</u> of <u>authority</u> instead of doing what is right for each other?	Overwhelming: a very large amount or with very strong emotion Trappings: the outward parts of an idea or thing What is the difference between power and the trappings of authority?	

- Now, in the last column, labeled “My Version,” rewrite the prompt in your own words.

Prompt	Definitions and Questions	My Version
Why do characters in this novel <u>overwhelmingly</u> seek out power and other <u>trappings</u> of <u>authority</u> instead of doing what is right for each other?	Overwhelming: a very large amount or with very strong emotion Trappings: the outward parts of an idea or thing What is the difference between power and the trappings of authority?	Why do the characters in this book very strongly seek out power and the outward parts of authority instead of being good to each other?

- If you can, share your version with other members of your group or with your teacher to help find out if your version really demonstrates that you understand exactly what the prompt is asking you to do or what question it is asking you to answer.
- Once you are sure that you really, truly understand the prompt, it’s time to write a claim (or take one you’ve already written) and make sure that it fo-

- cuses on the prompt. To do so, write down a list of reasons that the claim you have chosen is a good answer to the prompt. Make sure you explain how your claim really answers the prompt, as your claim needs to do more than just relate to the prompt. For example, if you are asked about power and authority, like in the question above, not every idea that relates to power or authority would really answer the prompt because it also asks about doing what is right.
8. If you are working with a claim you have already written, and you discover that it does not fit the prompt well enough, rewrite it based on your improved understanding of what is being asked.
 9. If you review your main claim, and you discover that it does fit the prompt well, continue reviewing your other claims and subclaims throughout the essay to ensure that they all fit the prompt and the main claim. Make sure that you do not begin discussing unrelated topics at any point in your essay.

Writing It Up

If you are early in the writing process, revise your main claim until you are confident that it truly answers the prompt. You can—and should—keep revising it throughout the writing process, but it helps to make sure you have good focus before you get deep into the writing process. If you are working with a full draft, take the improved version of your main claim and find at least one paragraph that is not truly relevant and connected to the prompt. Revise it to connect it more effectively.

Review your whole paper afterward. If you were revising a previous draft, know that sometimes rewriting your claim means you have to rewrite—or at least reframe—most of your paper. Make sure you can show how each part of your final draft responds to the prompt before resubmitting.