Size up your Assignment

The first step in the research process is to examine your assignment to determine what the instructor is looking for and what guidelines for the assignment. Take note of the following:

- **Topic:** Has the instructor assigned a specific topic or topics for you to write about, or can you choose a subject of interest to you within the scope of the course?
- **Type of research:** Does the assignment require original research (such as a survey or experiment that you conduct) or does it require secondary research (the interpretation of previously published research found in books or journal articles)?
- **Scope:** Does the instructor want you to analyse a topic from different viewpoints, or do you need to take one position and defend it?
- **Sources:** Are you required to use a certain number and/or type of sources in your research?
- **Presentation:** Does the instructor want a cover sheet and/or abstract? Is the instructor expecting the paper to include graphs or charts? Is the paper to be typed or can it be hand-written?
- **Length:** Has the instructor set a page or word limit on the paper?
- **Format:** Has the instructor given any guidelines regarding the layout of the paper, such as line spacing or use of page numbers?
- **Citation style:** Has the instructor specified a citation style for you to use in citing your sources? If not, which style is appropriate for your subject?
- **Due date:** When is your paper due? Do you have enough time to obtain all the materials you will need?