

## Top 5 Most Common Patterns of Error in Prompts Given to IWU Students

- 1. Word clarity:** Over half of the prompts we receive have words students are unfamiliar with peppered throughout.  
*How to address it:* What we recommend is spending time having students look over the prompt in class, circling words they are unfamiliar with, and then holding a discussion about these terms. Prompts are a key part of the writing process and this method is a simple way to test out how well your students understand what you're asking them to do. It also assists with #2.
- 2. Genre Conventions:** Genre expectations vary across the curriculum. For example, in a sociology class, you might have a very different style of thesis than that which you'd encounter in computer science. Additionally, the way you define a persuasive essay in environmental science might have significantly different components than the same essay type in an English course.  
*How to address it:* First, you can spend some time looking over sample essays and highlighting key components of your discipline's expectations. Secondly, you can invite the writing center director and/or tutors to your class to discuss with students some common misconceptions about writing in your discipline as compared to others. Finally, you can spend time in class--perhaps a lecture-- devoted to going over discipline conventions for writing in your field.
- 3. Examples:** A lot of time students don't understand what we're asking them to do when we're introducing a new genre or writing convention. Prompts especially tend to introduce a new topic but don't necessarily call back to it or provide examples.  
*How to address it:* While prompts can get lengthy and that's problematic for a shorter assignment (say 5 pages or less), you can include examples in the prompt if you so choose. Alternatively, you can call back to examples you provided in class/ class notes so students can go back and look at these concepts on their own and link what they're writing about to what they're learning about.
- 4. Formatting/ Style:** Students have assignments across the discipline so sometimes it's hard to remember which professor prefers subheadings and which doesn't. Or which one likes APA as opposed to Chicago. Including formatting information in every prompt eliminates this issue.  
*How to address it:* One option is, as mentioned above, share your formatting expectations in every prompt (especially if you do not provide a rubric). Alternatively, you can create a place on Moodle where you list formatting expectations that the students can then refer to on their own for each assignment. This second option has the added benefit of keeping your prompts brief and making you have to do less work.
- 5. Source Specifications:** Do you prefer students use only peer-reviewed journals? Do you require books in addition to articles? Do you even want outside sources? Students need to know but sometimes are not given this information.  
*How to fix it:* One thing we recommend is inviting in librarians to talk about different source specifications and where to find the sources that meet your criteria. Another option is to do this yourself. Additionally, you can provide examples of journals, periodicals, and so forth that you prefer students use. Finally, you can place source requirements on your rubric or on your Moodle like in suggestion 4 even if you do not put them on your prompt.