

HOW TO PREPARE FOR SUCCESS: ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

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Employees are usually eager to take an assignment or project given them by their manager; however, many times these projects or assignments can end in disappointment. Work assignments gone awry can cause conflict, problems, and confusion as well as affect important relationships. We rarely do lessons learned, so we do not know why something failed or was not as successful as we had hoped. We repeat the same patterns and behaviors that got us mediocrity and sometimes failure.

How can you, the employee, mitigate problem assignments, exceed expectations, and make your supervisor happy? What can you do to better prepare for an assignment to increase the likelihood of success?

The key is to take responsibility for gathering the necessary information in the beginning by asking the right questions before problems arise. When asked to take an assignment, task or project, the first response should be: I really want to do a great job for you, so can I clarify a few things before I start? Most managers will of course say yes. Once you have their attention, there are eleven questions to ask before moving forward.

1. **Context of Assignment:** Ask what your manager is going to do with the project, task, or assignment when it is completed. Also, you will want to know who it is for and how it fits in with other projects or initiatives currently going on in your work area, department, or agency.
2. **Deadline:** When does your manager want it completed and when is it really due?
3. **Scope and quality:** Ask if she wants a complete and thorough job, the quick and dirty version, or somewhere in between.
4. **Format:** How would she like to see the final product presented?
5. **Time budget:** How long do they expect it to take? This can provide information related to what your manager is thinking vs. what you are thinking. What kind of timeline does she have in mind to be able to judge whether you are on track or not?

6. **Relative priority:** How important is this assignment and how relative in priority is it related to your other assignments, tasks and responsibilities?
7. **Resources:** What resources are available to assist you to get the project or assignment completed; including, people, budget, and materials? You will also want to ask if this has been done before by your department or someone else, so you can benchmark what others have done or utilize existing processes, methods, and information.
8. **Success criteria:** How will you know you have been successful? You might have your manager describe in his own words what success looks like. How will your work be judged? What are the key elements of success? What is more important: to be fast, cheap, or perfect?
9. **Milestones:** Schedule meetings at the beginning for monitoring progress and communicating milestones and issues. This ensures that everyone is on track and on the same page related to the progress, quality and completion of the assignment.
10. **Clarify:** Review the information you have just captured to ensure everyone heard the same thing and confirm you got it right.
11. **Concerns:** Articulate any concerns you have related to getting the project done. This can include other demands on your time, resources not available, or challenges, etc., and provides an upfront discussion so there are no surprises later.

Ideally, this information should be communicated when delegating an assignment; however, most people have not thought through what they really want and the details it might take to accomplish what they envision. This provides you the opportunity to manage your performance, success, and your career by using this comprehensive questionnaire. Don't rely on others to provide necessary information. Prepare to be successful.

Failure to prepare is preparing to fail. (Benjamin Franklin)