

Before and After Assignment Prompt Makeover

This prompt makeover uses an example of two prompts that could conceivably be assigned to undergraduate students in a marketing course. The first prompt doesn't follow good prompt guidelines, while the second is a revision that helps students produce the kind of writing that advances their understanding of the field and their communication within it. This document applies the advice in the Designing Effective Writing Assignments guide and the Assignment Prompt Checklist—we recommend reading those first.

Prompt 1 — Marketing Analysis Paper. Choose a company and write a paper analyzing its marketing strategy. Discuss what the company does well and what it could improve. 4–5 pages, due Dec. 10. Use 3 sources.

The problems with this prompt:

- The verbs “analyze” and “discuss” invite summary and lead to “all about” data dumps.
- There is no audience beyond the professor.
- There is no genre (a ‘paper’ is not a genre), no stated purpose, no success criteria, no rubric.
- It requires students to “use 3 sources” without saying why or what sources are acceptable.

See the suggested revision in Prompt 2, which follows the structure Bean & Melzer praise in Marc McLeod's history prompt (Ch. 4):

Prompt 2 — Strategic Recommendation Memo. Marketing scholars continue to debate how established brands should respond when a smaller, digitally native competitor begins taking market share. School of thought suggests that incumbents should defend their position by matching the competitor's tactics, including introducing aggressive price cuts, a rapid social-media push, and imitation of the challenger's product features. Another holds that this is a slippery slope: that matching a disruptor's moves cedes the strategic initiative and erodes the incumbent's brand equity—a stronger response is to double down on the established brand's distinct advantages rather than adapt to the challenger.

Drawing on the campaign data, case studies, and frameworks we have worked with this semester, which approach would you recommend for major global cosmetics brand Maybelline as it faces competition from 2014-launched prestige makeup brand Glossier? If you favor direct response, explain why, and to which of Glossier's moves? If you favor differentiation, what specific advantages should Maybelline build on, and why will that outperform matching Glossier?

Write a **1,000–1,200-word strategy memo** making and defending **one specific recommendation**. The memo is due on December 10, 11:59pm. Assume you are writing as an external marketing consultant, addressing Maybelline's VP of Marketing—a person who knows the company intimately but has NOT read this assignment, is short on time, and is skeptical of consultants who state the obvious. A strong memo makes a specific, contestable recommendation and anticipates the top 1-2 objections Maybelline's VP is most likely to raise. Because this is a professional business document, follow the standard memo format we have practiced in class (To / From / Date / Subject, with specific, skimmable headings and an executive summary up top) rather than an academic essay structure. I will grade your memo using the following rubric: *rubric would go here*.

The benefits of this prompt:

- It adheres to the good prompt framework set out in the Assignment Prompt Checklist.
- The memo relies on a contestable and real disciplinary problem rather than a general topic.
- There is real rhetorical context—a memo, written by a consultant, sent to the VP.
- Audience-awareness is built into the context (short on time, skeptical).
- The genre (memo) teaches students that business writing follows different conventions to academic essay writing.