

# Digesting a New Project

Last Modified on 09/17/2024 3:22 pm PDT

When you are assigned a task or project at work, the instructions and deadline are often unclear. The secret to doing a good job is taking ownership of understanding what is expected of you. Your goal is to demonstrate that you're not only able to follow instructions, but you're able to help your team achieve its goals too. Here are some tips to follow:

**1. Understand what, how, and by when.** It is better to ask clarifying questions in the moment rather than make guesses in the future. You can ask, "Is there a certain process or template I should follow?" or "When would you like to check in?"

**2. Understand the RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed).** For every project there is someone responsible for doing the work, someone accountable for the success of the work, someone who needs to be consulted on the work, and someone who needs to be informed on the status of the work.

**3. Try to think multiple steps ahead.** Ask yourself, "Do I have everything I need to get started?" and "Do I understand how to do each step of this task?" If you receive conflicting instructions, ask for clarification. Nothing is too basic or obvious to clarify.

**4. Work backwards from the deadline.** Start by setting an internal deadline before the actual deadline to give yourself time to double check everything. Then set a midpoint deadline to make sure you're on track. Don't forget to check the calendar for holidays, events, PTO, etc.

**5. Try repeating instructions back.** To minimize misunderstandings, consider saying "In terms of next steps..." or "Am I missing anything?" If stakes are higher, consider repeating back in writing so that there's a record of it.

**6. See the big picture.** Doing this can help you understand why the task or project you're working on is important. Ask yourself, "What's the broader objective?" or "What does success look like?"

**7. Don't shy away from problems as they arise.** It can be easy to let dread, worry, and avoidance take over – don't do it! Bring your problems up to the right person to avoid bad surprises. When you present a problem, show that you've done everything you can to brainstorm some potential solutions. Make your questions specific. Instead of "What do you think?" try "Which do you prefer, A, B, or C?"

**8. Present your work carefully.** Finishing your work is actually the second to last step. The last step is to present your work to others so that they recognize your efforts.

Note: Content is adapted from the book [The Unspoken Rules: Secrets to Starting Your Career Off Right](#) with permission from Gorick Ng.