When your manager delegates new tasks, ask clarifying questions

Why do it?

Every time your manager asks you to do something new, they're indirectly saying, "I trust you." And every time you deliver, you're validating that trust. But in order to do your part, you need to know what's expected.

Asking clarifying questions is one of the best ways to guard against turning in assignments that fall short—and that erode your manager's trust in you.

How to do it:

After your manager explains the task, go through a mental checklist of potential gaps. You may want to start by asking your manager if they have time to answer a few questions.

Below is a list of potential areas to explore, with an example of a clarifying question following each:

- **All relevant deadlines.** "
  When would you like to see a proposal? What about a final deadline for the completed project?"
- **The task's priority relative to other things on your to-do list.**
  "How important is this compared to the website project? I'll try to get to both, but if I have to prioritize one over the other, which would you like me to finish first?"

- **The task's breadth and depth.** "*Would you like this to be a quick version, or should I take the extra time to do it more thoroughly?*"
- **Expected outcomes and criteria for success.** "*What will you be looking for when this task is done to determine whether or not it's successful?*"
- **Budget or other resource allowances and constraints.** "*Does Wei-Lin know I'll be reaching out for her help?*"
- **When and how you should loop your manager in.** "*Can we schedule a meeting halfway through so I can show you what I have and make sure I'm on track?*"

Keep your tone curious, rather than demanding. And don't forget to take notes—you might need to refresh your memory once you sit down and start working on the task.

More on managing up:

- [9 tips for establishing credibility with your boss](#)
- [What to do if your manager only delegates unimportant tasks to you](#)
- [What to do if your manager doesn't communicate well](#)