



LIBRARY
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Guide to Library Assignments for Faculty

Information Literacy is the ability to recognize a need for information, to persist in acquiring it, and to understand the value of it in personal, work and academic life.

Based on our experience providing instruction and reference services, we can pinpoint some factors that contribute to the effectiveness of a research assignment and others which contribute to research frustration.

The following suggestions are offered by the library faculty in the spirit of enhancing the research process and product for students, instructors, and librarians.

- **Schedule one or more library sessions to provide your students with skills, awareness of available sources, advice on developing search strategies. Require students to use the resources of the Library.**
- Never assume that your students have adequate library skills. Comfort with computers does not equal information literacy.
- **State what you expect the student to learn as a result of the assignment. How do objectives for the assignment fit in with your course objectives?**
- Avoid assignment of a single topic to an entire class. Alert librarians to an upcoming assignment that will require heavy library use. Ensure that the library resources are adequate for the assignment.
- **Enable the students to choose their specific subject from a broad range of topics. This allows variety for the students and guarantees that whole classes will not be looking for the same materials in the library.**
- Consult with a librarian about the requirements of the assignment and the availability of relevant print and electronic resources. The library is continually changing; new sources and ways of accessing information change everyday. Ask your liaison librarian to evaluate the resources.
- **Avoid referring students to specific journals to find articles on their topics unless browsing will serve a purpose. Browsing is not the best approach to most research for novice researchers. Students will generally have more success if they are referred to bibliographic sources (both electronic and print) that will help them locate information in a variety of journals.**
- **Know library jargon. When referring students to the library, distinguish between reference and reserve, between microfilm and microfiche, and**

between citations to periodical articles and periodical indexes to citations. Students tend to interpret library assignments very literally. Define any questionable terms.

- Differentiate between magazines and journals. When you mention the "library computer" be sure your students know if you mean the library catalog, the electronic databases, the Internet Resources, or the entire library web site?
- **Differentiate between Internet resources accessed through popular search engines and electronic resources subscribed to by the Library and delivered via the Library's web site. Let us help you make the distinction between searching and research with your students.**
- Give library assignments in writing (not orally) to reduce confusion and suggest students bring the assignment with them to the library each time they go.

Sample Research objectives:

- 1.) select and focus an appropriate research topic in a field; state the topic as a question and list other questions that must be answered to address the topic
- 2.) distinguish between popular and scholarly materials on a particular topic; consider audience, content, author, credibility, length, look, language, sources and organizational connections
- 3.) locate and evaluate the information necessary to support an argument

EXAMPLES for Critical Thinking

Choose assignments that require integration of knowledge rather than "scavenger hunt" assignments.

Assignments:

1. Use a published bibliography to identify items in the library's online catalog.
2. Contrast two journal articles or editorials from recent publications reflecting conservative and liberal thought.
3. Select two reference works that discuss your topic and describe three distinct features of each: why would you use it? what questions would it answer? what makes it different from other sources in the library? Write down information about the sources in correct citation format.