



Ideas for Library Research Assignments

The research paper has been the most commonly used method of evaluating whether students can successfully apply information seeking skills, but there are other ways that are especially suitable for undergraduates at this level. Below are some alternatives. Contact your librarian to discuss how any of these assignments may be adapted for your course.

1. Journal/Magazine Articles

Locate articles on a particular topic using a specified online periodical index. Write a short summary of each article and why it is considered relevant to the search topic.

Purpose: Students learn how to search by subject in an online index, interpret citations, evaluate the relevance of citations, locate the articles in the library's collection, as needed, and read critically for the essential information.

2. Reference Sources

Find information on an assigned topic(s) or find answers to assigned questions among a selected group of reference sources in the course subject area.

Purpose: Students learn how particular reference sources in the subject area being studied can be useful to augment the textbook and lecture material.

3. Popular Vs. Scholarly Information

Find two articles on the same topic, one from a popular magazine and the other from a professional journal, preferably a research study. Compare the treatment of the same topic written by a non-expert and one written by an

expert considering such things as accuracy, objectivity, coverage and accuracy.

Purpose: Teaches the students to consider the source of their information and to appreciate research activity and scholarship in the given field.

4. All But the Research Paper

Conduct the research for a term paper. Do everything except write it. Students submit a clearly defined topic, an annotated bibliography of useful sources, an outline of a paper, a thesis statement, and an opening paragraph and summary.

Purpose: Focuses on the stages of research and the parts of a paper, rather than on the writing of it.

5. Internet Search

Write a precise statement of the search topic and the keywords chosen for the topic. Run the search on two different search engines. List the steps taken to find the needed information. Evaluate the results from the two searches using particular criteria presented by the librarian.

Purpose: Teaches the mechanics of Internet searching, the importance of evaluating all sources retrieved from the Internet, the importance of preparing a search before going online, and the value in using more than one source for an information search.

6, Database Search

Prepare the search by selecting keywords or thesaurus terms, when available. Conduct a search in a pre-selected database (or have the students pick the most appropriate one). Find a specified number of references and write a short explanation on why the particular reference is relevant to the search topic.

Purpose: Shows the importance of advance preparation of the search and teaches how to use a particular database. Challenges students to find relevant sources and justify their selections.

7. Examine Coverage of A Controversial Issue

Examine the treatment of a controversial issue in several different sources such as newspapers, books, magazines, scholarly journals, and web sites. Write a paper that presents a balanced point of view on the issue or ask the students to take a position based on the information.

Purpose: Gives them experience in locating different kinds of sources and selecting from a large volume of references. Emphasizes that there are multiple perspectives on any issue and stresses the importance of making informed decisions.

8. Finding Supporting Information

Give the students an article to critique. Have them locate two sources (other articles, web sites) which support (or not) the points made in the original article.

Purpose: Gives the students an opportunity to understand the importance of using more than one source when gathering information.

9. Comparing Print and Web Resources

Locate and examine a print source and a web site on the same topic to determine indicators of quality in each item; where exactly they found those indicators; and the appropriate use for each item.

Purpose: Students will learn that the Web has not replaced print resources but rather the Web should be used as a complement to them.

Adapted from a list published by the Memorial University of Newfoundland Libraries (2000).

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