



Creating Effective Library Research Assignments



What is the purpose of a library assignment for your course?

The assignment:

- strives to teach about the course content through the use of outside resources found through library research.
- leads to increased understanding of a subject.
- leads to acquisition of skills needed to locate information about a subject.
- makes students aware of the variety of information sources in your discipline.
- teaches students to select and evaluate quality information sources appropriate to their research topic.
- reinforces habits of ethical scholarship including citing sources and abiding by the Copyright Law.



How can you prepare your students for your assignment?

- Tell your students why they are doing this assignment and what purpose it serves.
- If the assignment requires the use of specific sources, give the students a list of them and make sure that the Library has them.
- Schedule a customized library instruction session with your Librarian who will teach your students the skills necessary to effectively complete the research for your assignment.



What are the characteristics of effective library research assignments?

1. The assignment is clear and students know what you want them to learn and why.

- Make sure your students know what they are supposed to do by stating your expected learning outcomes for the assignment.
- Tell them what kinds of sources you expect them to use.
- Give them a grading rubric to help them understand your criteria for success.
- Put the assignment in writing.

2. Correct and unambiguous terminology is used.

Familiarize your students with terms that you may take for granted. To prevent student frustration:

- state the differences between magazines and journals when there is a specific requirement for either or both.
- let your students know that the following terms for journals are often used interchangeably: "scholarly journals," "peer-reviewed journals," "research journals," "professional journals."
- explain what you mean when you tell your students to only use the Internet. Since all of our online databases for finding articles are on the Internet, can your students use these as well as Internet search engines (like Google or Yahoo) to find their information? As you know, the type of information found in each can be very different.
- explain what you mean when you tell their students not to use the Internet. Are you including the Library's online databases in this instruction?
- use the full and current titles of journals and databases.

3. There is a critical thinking component.

Design assignments that require your students to evaluate, analyze and synthesize the information they find. Consult with your librarian about designing an assignment that challenges them yet permits them to acquire basic and more mechanical research skills.

4. Students are given opportunities for learning the knowledge and skills needed.

- Provide your students with the instruction they need in your class or schedule an instruction session with your librarian.
- The library instruction session will be customized for your assignment and is likely to include knowledge and skills that are not acquired in

other library instruction sessions, such as those done for English courses.

- Do not assume that your students have the skills necessary to complete your assignment successfully. Many of our students do not adequately learn these skills in high school.
- Your students may in fact have the skills necessary to do the assignment and may tell you this, but repetition can reinforce concepts and can give them an opportunity to hone skills.

5. Learning of knowledge and skills needed for the assignment are assessed.

Besides assessing or grading the final product, consider including these "checkpoints":

- First, check the knowledge and skills acquired during your own session or the librarian's instruction session about how to find the needed information. Do not assume they "got it" just because they showed up. Work with your librarian to design a quiz or some learning activity that tells you and them that they learned the material.
- Second, for an extended project like a paper, establish deadlines by which the students need to hand in work, such as topic ideas, an outline of how the paper or project will be structured or handing in a list of sources that they expect to use for their research project. This keeps your students from procrastinating. It also gives both you and the student a chance to make sure they're making progress in the right direction.
- Finally, assess the sources that they used for their paper or project, not just the product itself. To what extent did they find and use appropriate sources for your assignment? Besides asking them to document or cite their sources, require that they also state why they decided to use those sources.

6. The assignment can be reasonably done within the time allowed and with available resources.

- Make sure that the information resources that you expect your students to use are available.
- Consider putting materials on reserve to ensure that your students can easily access them.

- Do the assignment yourself to see how long it takes before you decide how long students need to do it.
- Allow for the students' limited research experience and such processes as using microfilm and Interlibrary Loan.

7. The assignment includes information and instruction on the ethical use of information.

- Include a policy on plagiarism in the syllabus.
- Require that the students submit work in intervals in order to avoid plagiarism.
- Explain the concept and purpose of attribution of sources or citing.
- Tell them about the Copyright Law.



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