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Tips for Designing Library Research Assignments

- **Address Learning Goals Related to the Research Process.** Information Literacy, the ability to find information and use it effectively to accomplish a specific purpose, is included among the “Essential Learning Outcomes” for students at UW-Madison. Consider what research skills you would like students to develop in completing the assignment and discuss with your students the importance of developing those skills.
- **Be Clear about Your Expectations.** Remember that your students may not have prior experience with scholarly journals, monographs, or academic libraries. Spend time in class discussing how research is produced and disseminated in your discipline and how you expect your students to participate in academic discourse in the context of your class.
- **Scaffolding your Assignment Brings Focus to the Research Process.** Breaking a complex research assignment down into a sequence of smaller, more manageable parts has a number of benefits: it models how to approach a research question and effective time management, it gives students the opportunity to focus on and master key research skills, it provides opportunities for feedback, and it can be an effective deterrent to plagiarism.
- **Devote Class Time to Discussion of the Assignment in Progress.** Periodic discussions in class can help students reflect on the research process and its importance, encourage questions, and help students develop a sense that what they are doing is a transferable process that they can use for other assignments.
- **Criteria for Assessment.** In your criteria for assessment (i.e. written instructions, rubrics), make expectations related to the research process explicit. For example, are there specific expectations for the types of resources students should use and how they should be cited? Research shows that students tend to use more scholarly sources when faculty provide them with clear guidelines regarding the types of sources that should be used.
- **Test Your Assignment.** In testing an assignment yourself, you may uncover practical roadblocks (e.g., too few copies of a book for too many students, a source is no longer available online). Librarians can help with testing your assignment, suggest strategies for mitigating roadblocks (i.e. place books on reserve for your students, suggest other resources), or design customized supporting materials (i.e. handouts or web pages).
- **Collaborate with Librarians.** Librarians can help you design an effective research assignment that helps students develop the research skills you value and introduces your students to the most useful resources. We also can work with you to develop and teach a library instruction session for your students that will help them learn the strategies they will need in order to complete your assignment.
- For more information about how we can help, please go to the campus Library & Information Literacy Instruction Program’s Web site at: <http://www.library.wisc.edu/inst-services/> .