
CREATING SUCCESSFUL LIBRARY ASSIGNMENTS—QUICK TIPS

PURPOSE: Be clear about what you would like the students to accomplish. Why are they doing the assignment? Explain to the students what they are expected to learn.

FEASIBILITY: Please don't set the students up for failure! Try doing the assignment yourself first to make sure that the necessary materials are in the library and that the assignment is really doable. Also, keep in mind that the students may not be familiar with sources that seem intuitive to you. Ask a librarian for assistance in creating your assignments. In general, assignments that are based on using a certain type of tool (databases, subject encyclopedias, Web sites) are more successful than treasure hunts.

RELEVANCE: Whenever possible, tie the library assignments to other assignments or to some aspect of the students' personal experiences or fields of study.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS: Encourage a critical approach to what students find in the library. That is, don't structure your assignments so students merely have to find a piece of information; require them to comment on it or analyze it. One obvious way to do this is to set up the assignment so that they will have to make comparisons between two or more sources of information. Or, have the students look at the potential impact of something or agree/disagree with a researched viewpoint.

ACCURACY: Try to use precise library terminology for students. Telling them to use the library computers is extremely ambiguous. Do you want them to search the library catalog, the periodical databases, the Web? If you tell them they can't use the Internet as a source they often think that applies to articles found through the periodical and reference databases, because those are available via the Internet. If you exclude encyclopedias as a source, does that mean they can't use specialized scholarly encyclopedias, such as *The Encyclopedia of Bioethics*?

GETTING HELP: If you have questions or would like assistance in developing a good library assignment, contact a librarian at extension 241.

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