



Creating Effective FYS Library Assignments

Worcester State University Library

www.worcester.edu/library



(508)
929-8027

Rapid changes in technology have created a revolution in the ways libraries provide access to information. Our collections and services are constantly changing, and these changes will affect assignments. Hopefully, librarians and faculty working together can make library assignments better learning experiences for students.

TIPS FOR PLANNING A LIBRARY EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR FYS COURSE

Make it Relevant:

- Students will value the library as an educational resource **only** if you place a premium on it from the start.
- Build library assignments into your class related to the context of your course, not merely as a means of teaching library use.
- Teach students to select and evaluate quality information sources appropriate to their topics.
- Reinforce habits of ethical scholarship.

Don't Assume Students Know the Basics – despite what they say

- Very few students are aware of the extent of the Library's holdings or how to access the resources.
- Despite the tech savvy of most students, the library's electronic resources aren't "self-explanatory."

Be Clear in Your Explanations

- What exactly do the terms "peer review journal" and "primary" sources mean to your discipline?
- If you prohibit the use of the Web for research, some students assume they cannot even use the Library's online catalog or electronic databases.
- If you tell them to have (for example) 5 books and 3 periodicals in their bibliography, students are more concerned with the numbers than choosing the best sources.

Semester Hours

Monday to Thursday:

8am–11:00pm

Friday: 8am–5pm

Saturday: 9am–5pm

Sunday: 1pm–9pm

Email: library@worcester.edu

People in virtual libraries spend a lot of time simply finding their way around: in fact, they spend as much time finding their bearings as actually viewing what they find

There is much evidence that young people are unaware of library-sponsored content, or at least reluctant to use it.

Web log analysis reveals that user behaviour is very diverse... one size does **not** fit all.

Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future. A Cyber Briefing Paper. JISC (UK) 1/11/08

Schedule a library research workshop at the right time

- General introductions to the library – if unrelated to the assignment or a course – are boring and the information in the session is quickly forgotten by students
- Students should be aware of their assignment, your required elements, and have a topic selected before the library session. Students learn best when they have an incentive to do so – having their assignment ahead of time makes the workshop meaningful.

Pitfalls to Avoid:

- ***Requiring resources not available:*** Students easily become frustrated when told to use a certain resource in the Library, only to find that we don't own or license it. Test your assignment before giving it out. If we don't have the resources you need, we need to know about it.
- ***Giving an entire class the same assignment:*** These resources usually will end up difficult to find, disappear, or be vandalized. If it is necessary for the whole class to use particular information resources, put them on Reserve at the Circulation Desk, or put a link to it in your Blackboard site.
- ***Giving a scavenger hunt:*** This is the least effective assignment possible. Asking students to locate random facts lacks purpose, does not teach meaningful library research, and may be frustrating. Librarians – not students – usually end up locating the answers.
- ***Unreasonable time frame:*** Remind students that research takes time. Allow for students' limited perspective and their inexperience in library research. Many students waste time because the library has the material in paper, microfilm, or electronic resources that they were unaware of previously.

Plagiarism and Citing

- Any research assignment raises the possibility of students plagiarizing materials they find or failing to cite correctly.
- Students know a dictionary definition of plagiarism. Go further and provide examples of proper paraphrase and citation. What was acceptable in high school may be quite different.
- Provide opportunities for evaluating strategies and sources (such as a research log) so that you can share with them what **you** look for when you analyze information.
- Grade their bibliographies for quality of sources and balance, not just for style.

Information compiled from many library sites on the Web. See links on the next page for examples of faculty assignments for their FYS courses.



Websites for Effective Library Assignments

Worcester State University Library

www.worcester.edu/library



- [*Designing assignments to develop information literacy skills*](#) Drew University (NJ) –Gives Information Literacy standards, questions for faculty to ask themselves when designing library assignments, and descriptions of 21 creative library assignments.
- [*Want better research papers?*](#) Eastern CT State University Designed just for teaching faculty. Tons of links to online articles, samples for teaching things such as peer review and search strategy, evaluating Web resources, and more.
- [*Term paper alternatives*](#) Kings College (PA) Ideas for information based assignments. 33 alternative assignments broken down by type of information skill and what the purpose of the assignment is in relation to information literacy objectives.
- [*ACRL Information Literacy*](#) Assoc. of College & Research Libraries. Information Literacy in a nutshell for faculty: tutorial; adapting the standards; links to sample assignments.
- [*Creating effective library research assignments*](#) Valdosta State University (FL) Checklist for elements of good library assignments, quick tips for creating library research assignments, library research tips to share with your students, and tips for developing Web based assignments.
- [*Sample assignments - Ideas for research assignments incorporating the use of information retrieval systems.*](#) Buena Vista University (IA) 35 assignments matched to the information skill that they are designed to teach. Aimed at FYS courses but certainly adaptable to any subject level or discipline.

Betsey Brenneman
Electronic Resources Librarian 2/09