

PURPOSE OF COURSE-RELATED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

An effective research assignment ...

- has a specific, understood purpose.
- relates to some aspect of course subject matter or learning objectives.
- leads to increased understanding of a subject or the process of locating information related to a subject.
- makes students aware of the variety of information sources and formats available.
- teaches students to select and evaluate quality information sources appropriate to their topics.
- reinforces habits of ethical scholarship.



PREPARING YOUR STUDENTS

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 arrangements with the Libraries to assure availability and access.

If it involves the use of complex sources or unfamiliar research strategies, your students will need to be oriented to these--by you or by a librarian--in a customized, scheduled library instruction session.

LIBRARIANS CAN HELP

Librarians are an excellent resource for developing research assignments; subject specialists understand the specific needs of students in each department.

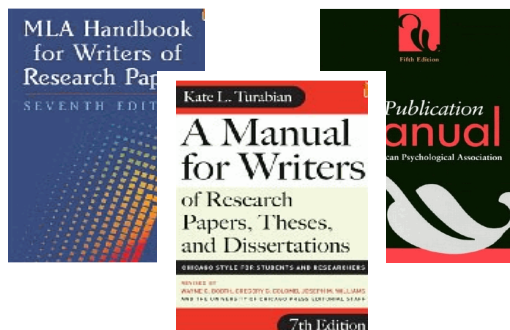
When an assignment is over, librarians may be able to give feedback. Did students seem confused or have trouble understanding the assignment? Were there any resource access problems? Librarians will teach customized instructional sessions for faculty in any campus department.



PLAGIARISM AND CITING

Any assignment raises the possibility of students plagiarizing materials they find or failing to cite correctly. Spend time instructing your students **why** citing is important and **how** to avoid these violations of ethical scholarship.

Librarians are available to collaborate with you to teach your students about citation styles & more: www.lib.umd.edu/guides/specialists.html



CREATING EFFECTIVE RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

www.lib.umd.edu/guides/assignment.html



**Working together
faculty and librarians
can make
research assignments
better learning experiences
for students**

**University of Maryland Libraries
User Education Services**

libues@umd.edu

www.lib.umd.edu/UES/

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE ASSIGNMENTS

Clarity

Provide students with the parameters of library assignments *in writing*.

Correct and unambiguous terminology

Students tend to interpret research assignments literally and are easily confused by terms that they or a librarian cannot interpret definitively.

Currency

Check your assignments regularly so that you are not asking students to use outdated or withdrawn sources. Library collections are dynamic!

Reasonable Time Frame

Do the assignment yourself to see how long it takes before you decide how long students need to do it, allowing for their limited perspective and inexperience and for movement of materials.



Help by giving advance notice

Librarians need to know about your assignment ahead of time:

Librarians listed by subject:

www.lib.umd.edu/guides/specialists.html

Librarians listed by school or college:

www.lib.umd.edu/guides/specialists_school.html

YOUR STUDENTS' USE OF LIBRARY AND WEB RESOURCES

Print sources vs. electronic sources

Since different types of information may only be available electronically or in print, both traditional print sources and Web documents are necessary to do thorough research on most topics.

- Many resources are only available in print.
- Electronic sources of information may provide more sophisticated search capabilities, may be available remotely, and can be used simultaneously by many different people.
- Information is often available on the Web before it is available in print.
- Much scientific, government and current events information is only available electronically.



Limiting "Web" sources

If you choose to limit the number of Web sources students may use, there may be problems with this requirement:

- Students are unclear whether "Web" means all information sources that are delivered via the World Wide Web (including the Libraries' scholarly electronic databases, e-journals, online catalog, etc.) or only sources on the *free* Web.

- There is usually no difference in the content of books, journal articles, government documents or other materials in paper, on microfilm, or on the Web.
- Some electronic full text material is not available on paper in the library.



PITFALLS TO AVOID

Assuming most students know the basics

Do not assume that your students have had prior experience using a campus library, a prior orientation to the UM Libraries, or that their general orientation is relevant to your assignment.

Requiring resources not available

Retest an assignment before giving it out. Library collections are dynamic.

Giving an entire class the exact same assignment

Needed resources will be difficult to find at best, disappear or be vandalized at worst. If everyone in a class needs a particular source, put it on course reserves or use an online source.

Giving a scavenger hunt

The least effective assignment asks students to locate random facts. It lacks a clear purpose, does not teach students to do meaningful research, and may be frustrating.