



Assignments that Help Build Information Literacy Skills

- **Check with the Richland College Library in advance** of the assignment to assure availability of, and access to required resources. Today's library environment is dynamic and our electronic resources change from one day to the next. **One of the Instructional Services librarians** (*Sharlee Jeser-Skaggs, Gary Duke, Alice Fulbright, Amy Ferguson, Doris Smith, Jeanetta Burnham*) will be happy to assist you with designing a research assignment. Contact us by phone at 972-238-6082 or by e-mail at richlandlibrary@dccc.edu.
- **Provide the Library with a copy of your assignment.** Often students have vague ideas about their specific assignments. If we have a copy, we can more easily help them accomplish your learning objectives.
- **Don't assume that students know the basics.** Many of our students have little or no prior experience using a college library or library sources. Students tend to use the Web as the first place they go to for information. **Encourage students to attend the free information literacy classes** that the Library offers each semester. See our schedule at: <http://www.rlc.dccc.edu/lrc/infolit.htm> .
- **Test the assignment beforehand.** Try to put yourself in the role of the inexperienced and confused student who is faced with using the vast array of college library resources. An assignment that sounds simple (e.g., "Find three journal articles on your topic") may become a complex challenge when the student has to decide on a topic, determine which of over 100 databases to search, master the computer interface used to search for the articles, define the proper search terms, and then has to decide which of several hundred articles to select.
- **Topic Selection.** Students often choose broad topics when asked to do a research paper, and they may have difficulty constructing a research question from a broad issue (e.g., "I need to do a paper on the environment."). Before students select their topics, consider an exercise in which students create a research question. Have them define their topic, narrow it to a manageable sub-topic, and develop a list of key concepts and terms. A brief tutorial on how to narrow a topic can be accessed at: http://www.lib.calpoly.edu/infocomp/modules/01_define/index.html .
- **Describe the specifics of the assignment.** Length, format you desire for their references (e.g., MLA format), acceptable types of sources (books, magazine articles, primary, secondary sources, Web sites).
- **Allow for incremental and continual improvement.** Allow students to choose a topic early in the semester. Have them turn in a list of initial sources. Check the appropriateness of the sources selected (this will also help prevent plagiarism). Have them turn in a revised topic statement based on consultation of initial sources. This emphasizes the process of incorporating new information into the student's knowledge base.
- **Provide examples.** Many students may not understand the distinction between popular and scholarly sources or the difference between primary and secondary sources. If you require students to use articles from peer reviewed journals, provide examples in the assigned readings, refer to them, and discuss the author's credentials, and elements of the research process.
- **Student Use of the Web.** The use of the Web is rapidly expanding, and library materials are increasingly delivered to us via the Web. Students will come to the reference desk and state that they are not allowed to use sources from the Web, yet nearly all of our magazines, newspapers, and scholarly journals are now available via the Web through our library database subscriptions. Be precise in your instructions for student use of the Web for research, and reinforce the distinction between such standard, reliable library resources and general Web searching.
- **Encourage students to use Richland's ASAP.** The Richland Library and the Center for Tutoring and Learning Connections have a comprehensive guide to the research process at <http://www.myasap.net>. Many tutorials and examples are provided. This important tool can help students plan their research assignment work in a systematic and timely manner.