Research & Writing Assignments: More Ideas for Papers, Projects, or Annotated Bibliographies

Understanding differences between search engines, databases, and publication types

- Gather and compare information found by searching web search engines and library search tools such as Summon. Write about the kinds of information each search tool finds. Describe the criteria that should be used to judge the resources.
- Analyze coverage of a topic by investigating different types of materials—e.g., popular & scholarly, primary and secondary. Describe what is learned from each form of writing.
- Write a proposal with bibliography of scholarly and popular sources for a practical project with positive environmental, political, and/or economic ramifications.
- Work in a group of two to four students. Pick a broad, large topic which can be researched historically and is still being explored today (e.g. poverty in the US). One partner researches the past (say, 1960-1990) through print means, and the present (1990-2010) through electronic sources. The other partner does the opposite search. Or, four people could each work on one of the searches. What sources are found and what are the strengths and weaknesses of each?

Understanding the information cycle

- Analyze and describe how an event is reported over time. Look for news items at time of event, opinion magazine articles, scholarly analyses in journals, books.
- Trace the development of a medical treatment or scientific process. Include discussion of how current research has influenced earlier medical practice or scientific understanding.
- Give students a dissertation by a well-known scholar and have them find related articles and books by the author. Include discussion of how the author has revised or expanded the topic and/or discuss how the writing has changed for different content types (books, journal articles, popular sources).
- Literature Review: Have students read the literature review section of an assigned journal article or Annual Reviews article. Then have them write a literature review with bibliography on another topic.

Using background / factual sources

- Prepare for an interview of a current world leader or other prominent person. Gather country, political, biographical, etc. information, listing sources.
- Find an interesting array of information about a place, and write a brief chapter for a travel book in a foreign language.
- Structured "treasure hunt" type assignment, where students have a list of questions to be answered and are given a list of resources to check. They find the answers and cite the sources.
Evaluating sources

- Choose one book that has bearing on your subject. Students find and read 2-3 reviews of the work, then write a response to one of the reviews.
- Choose a controversial article or one that has been heavily critiqued by scholars. First, have students read the article and write and submit their own critique (no outside sources). Then have students research the article to discover what others have said and write a response to that criticism. Have students reflect on what they learned about evaluating articles.
- Find a popular article that is based on scholarly research (example: a health or policy topic). Have students track down sources mentioned and describe how well the facts and arguments are presented, and whether important findings were omitted or misrepresented. Have students hypothesize on why any omissions or misrepresentations might have occurred.
- Assign a topic that has had a lot of industry-funded research (e.g., smoking, obesity, health effects of particular drugs or products). Have students find research studies and articles in scholarly journals. For each article cited, have students write annotations noting the funding source for the research and the researcher(s)' affiliations. For background, have students read articles that discuss industry funded research. Example: Coca-Cola Funds Scientists Who Shift Blame for Obesity Away From Bad Diets.

Literary and/or historical assignments

- Compare historical reviews and more recent criticisms of a literary work.
- Research and write about historical events or circumstances that provide the setting for a literary work.
- Research a topic in digital primary source material from an earlier time period. Include a discussion of the contemporary terminology used at the time (and keywords searched with) that illustrates the topic or concept.

Performing arts assignments

- Find reviews of different performances of a play or musical work and compare how the work was interpreted, adapted, or performed over time.

Persuasive and/or popular writing

- Write an editorial that incorporates and cites facts from outside research.

Tip: If including an annotated bibliography, direct students to the Annotated Bibliographies Guide (go/annotate/) for help with how to write one. Also see the Citation Guide (go/citations/)

Contact Us!

- go/liaisons/: librarian contact information
- go/infolit/: read more about information literacy skills and how librarians can help