Planning Checklist: Research Assignments

It is important to collaborate with librarians, anticipate student stumbling blocks, and have a list of resources ready to guide students successfully through the research process. Using this checklist can help you in the planning process, save your time, and help your students succeed.

ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS

General Assignment Considerations
___Relate assignments to some aspect of course subject matter or learning objectives.
___Increase understanding of both the subject and process for locating information with a structured assignment.

Encouraging Time Management
___Scaffold assignment activities to build upon each other, culminating in the final project.
___Provide a timeline to inform students how far along they should be by certain dates (see Research Paper Planner); set deadlines which allow students sufficient time for exploration, research, drafts and final production.

Type of Assignment
___Consider experimenting with shorter, less-complex essays or projects instead of a term paper (article summaries, scholarly paper analysis, annotated bibliographies, etc.), and specify the number and types of sources required.

Modeling and Grading
___Provide models of exemplary research projects.
___Provide a grading rubric so instructor expectations are understood.

Involve a librarian in the design and research guidance phases
___Confirm that published research exists to support the research assignment and required (textbook) and recommended sources are available at the Pierce Library, or as free, Open Education Resources (OERs).
___Require each student to research a different topic to ensure the library offers enough print resources.
___Suggest sources that align with students’ levels (reading ability, knowledge of subject matter, and search skills).
___Set reasonable expectations about the use of print versus online sources. (Sometimes, the most recent information is no longer available in print, e.g. many government publications are now only online).
**RESEARCH GUIDANCE** Provide the Pierce Library link:
http://library.piercecollege.edu/home

**Getting Started (General Knowledge/Research Process and Questions)**

- Understand the Research Process (e.g. Kulthau’s [Information Search Process](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home);
  [ACRL Information Literacy Standards](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home);
  [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home))
- Define research assignment terminology so that it does not create ambiguity (e.g., handouts stating that students cannot use the Internet, yet they must locate articles in the library’s online subscription databases).

**Searching for Information**

- Direct students where to find a variety of resources including digital (library databases, catalog, blogs, wikis, websites, etc.).
- Recommend and require specific sources, such as library databases, reference materials, scholarly sources, etc.
- Review search strategies with your students (Boolean operators, full-text, scholarly limiters, advanced searching, subject searching).
- Permit students to change their topics based on the reality of their research experience.

**Evaluating Information**

- Require appropriate authority, content, and timeliness (use evaluation guides such as [Tips for Evaluating Websites](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home)).

**Using Information**

- Inform students of how to avoid plagiarism (e.g. Purdue’s Online Writing Lab: [Preventing Plagiarism](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home) or Pierce Library’s guide: [Plagiarism](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home)).
- Address note-taking, paraphrasing, summarizing, and ethical scholarship.
- Provide citation guidance: [Citing Your Sources](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home) (Pierce Library).
- Give technical “how to” instructions for researching, using, creating and evaluating digital sources such as blogs, wikis, or streaming videos.

**SUPPORT**

- Include links and contact information for Librarian(s), Tech Support, and Tutoring services in addition to your own contact information.
- Invite your college librarian to class (shows students that even you are asking the librarian for assistance).
- Connect students to their college library: Pierce Library.
- Connect students to guides such as [Choosing a Topic](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home) and [Search Techniques](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home).
- Demonstrate support services in class, such as [Ask us now](http://library.piercecollege.edu/home) (24/7 Chat with a librarian).

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