

Guidelines for Effective Library and Research Assignments

An academic library can be very intimidating for our students and many undergraduates have little knowledge of its resources and use. Without instruction in the use of appropriate academic research tools, students will use the open web exclusively for their academic work. Below are some strategies to assist in building effective and collaborative relationships among students, faculty, librarians and the library.

- Design plagiarism-proof assignments by avoiding open-ended topics that can easily be plagiarized from the web. Research projects that require incremental steps to the final product decrease the likelihood of plagiarism. For example, setting due dates for the formulation of a research question, a bibliography of selected sources with short annotations, and a draft, will yield better results than having students write a paper on a topic of their choice without guidance and feedback along the way.
- Emphasize research as a process and teach strategies appropriate to research in your discipline. Have students utilize an assignment calculator (http://library.rwu.edu/assignment_calculator/index.php) that assists them in scheduling due dates for each part of the process.
- Check the library's website (<http://library.rwu.edu>), or consult with a librarian to discover what's new, which resources may be appropriate for your course and how to incorporate the library's resources into your assignment.
- Specify the kinds of sources that are acceptable for the assignment. Consider recommending specific research tools, such as a general library database (Academic Search Premier) for retrieving scholarly articles on a topic. Depending on the course and level, a subject-specific database such as PsycINFO, Westlaw, Mergent or Science Direct may be preferable to ASP.
- Work with your librarian to design a library instruction session that will help students prepare for their research assignment. Librarians will provide unique course and assignment- related resource guides for your class.
- Provide clear and specific guidelines for the finished product, including number of sources, and citation format.
- Deliver a copy of the assignment to one of the Reference Librarians. It will help us clarify student needs, and assist them with their research.
- Avoid scavenger hunts. The pursuit of facts unrelated to a specific assignment provides no long-term benefit to the student.
- Consider having a librarian as a TA in your Blackboard course. Students will then have a designated "research partner" to assist with their work.