

Alternatives to Traditional Research Papers

Reminders:

- Anything you assign relating to research should work within the context of your course curriculum, and contribute to the students' understanding of the course content.
- Aspects of the assignments may require instructional support. Librarians can provide handouts and other instructional materials, conduct library instruction sessions within the Library, or visit your class to discuss one or two research concepts or skills.
- Not all of these assignments are appropriate for every level.

Objective: Students distinguish between scholarly publications and other types of sources.

1. Select one popular magazine article, one scholarly journal article, and one Internet site on your topic. Compare them according to authorship, accuracy, currency, coverage, and logic. [If students are working on a research project and you are allowing them to use a variety of sources, not just scholarly ones, you might incorporate this exercise to encourage them to reflect on the differences between the sources they find.]
2. Starting with a short article or announcement in the popular press, locate the research on which the popular article was based. Evaluate the accuracy of the popular article.
3. Locate book reviews from both scholarly and popular sources and compare them. Who is the audience? What expertise does the reviewer have? What is the primary purpose of the review?

Objective: Students locate supplemental information in order to deepen understanding of the course material.

1. Select a scholar/researcher in a field of study and explore that person's career and ideas. Besides locating biographical information, prepare a bibliography of that individual's writings and analyze the reaction of the scholarly community to the researcher's work.
2. Each student in the class is given responsibility for dealing with a part of the subject of the course. He or she is then asked to 1) find out what the major reference sources on the subject are; 2) find out "who's doing what where" in the field; 3) list three major unresolved questions about the subject; 4) prepare a 15 minute oral presentation to introduce this aspect of the subject to the class.

Objective: Students critically evaluate sources.

1. Read an editorial and find facts to support it.
2. Contrast journal articles or editorials from recent publications reflecting conservative and liberal tendencies.

3. Find a web site appropriate to your project. Cite this page according to the assigned style manual and write 2-3 paragraphs evaluating the site you have chosen.
4. Locate and compare two contemporary accounts of an event.

Objective: Students appropriately cite sources.

1. Read an article cited in a research paper. Explain how it is related to the paper, how the author cites the article and why.

Objective: Students understand the difference of scope and focus represented in monographs, journal articles, etc., and of the relative importance of each medium to different disciplines.

1. Create an anthology of resources on a topic, and write an introduction that explains how they all fit together.
2. Create a research guide on a narrowly-focused topic. Describe the topic and list the best sources in the field.
3. Examine the treatment of a specific topic in a journal article, book, and encyclopedia article. Describe the differences in tone, scope (extent of coverage of the topic), and currency.

Objective: Students use appropriate basic access tools (catalogs vs. indices) to retrieve information.

1. Locate articles on a particular topic using a specified article database.
2. Compare items retrieved by searches using two different article databases.

Objective: Students formulate appropriate and efficient search strategies when using various general and discipline-based tools.

1. Keep a record of library research: methodology, sources consulted, keywords or headings searched, noting both successes and failures.
2. Perform a database search. Provide a precise statement of the search topic, a list of keywords or thesaurus terms (as appropriate), and an outline of search logic. Justify the choice of databases. Carry out the search.

Objective: Students select appropriate discipline-based access tools (e.g., MLA)

1. Compare a Google search and a database search. Provide a precise statement of the search topic. Run the search in Google and also in a discipline-specific database.

Present some representation of the search results and compare the findings.

2. Compare the search results of a search from a general database and a subject-specific database.

Objective: Students are able to locate materials in the UCB system and how to access materials outside of it.

1. Given five photocopies of sources purported to be on a stated topic, explain how they can be located. Name databases or catalogs used to locate and give search statements which would retrieve these sources.
2. Given five citations for sources related to the course, determine whether they are available in the UCB system and how they can be retrieved.

Objective: Students recognize the characteristics of scholarly discourse in a discipline.

1. Examine a journal. Go to the library (or online) to examine an issue of a key journal in the field (designated by the instructor) and respond to questions about format and content.
2. Analyze the content, style and audience of three journals in a given discipline.
3. Update an existing bibliography or review of the literature.
4. Pick a topic and research it in literature from the 60s and 70s. Then research the same topic in the literature of the 80s and 90s. Compare and contrast the topic in a bibliographic essay.
5. Identifying the major journals published in a discipline. Compare and contrast their approach and perspective. Analyze their content, tone, audience and impact.
6. Look at a periodical index [or yearbook, handbook, etc.] at 10-year intervals to determine trends in research in the discipline. Explain how issues, content and methods have changed.
7. Explore through book reviews, biographical information, and citation indexes how and why a work becomes a "classic." What effect does a classical work have on a discipline?
8. Locate and read three or four book reviews of a work that have appeared in scholarly journals and describe the critical reception of the book.
9. Locate articles on the same topic from subject specific encyclopedias from two disciplines. Compare the treatment of the topic.
10. Write or present a brief intellectual biography of a scholar identified or read in the course. Select a scholar prolific enough to leave a traceable trail. Locate dissertations, articles and books by the author and trace shifts or developments in his/her interests or

understanding of the field.

11. Begin with a famous novel at least fifty years ago. Identify what critics were saying about that work 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 years ago. How did it change? Investigate one or two of those years for social issues which may have had an impact on the critics' ideas.