

From ACC Library Services

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT TUNE-UP



**Hoping to get a little more mileage out of that tried
and true research assignment?**

Maybe it needs a tune-up!

You won't be surprised to hear that librarians strongly encourage you to include some research assignments in your syllabus. More than ever, in the Information Age research skills are real-world skills.

As you know, an outdated or unclear assignment can frustrate a student rather than enhance their understanding of a subject.

When creating or revising a research assignment, consider the following:

- **Not all students have the computer skills necessary to access the web, e-mail or online resources.**
- **New sources and ways of accessing information replace old ones every day.**

Information resources are continually being added, deleted, and changing in general, and these changes will affect your assignments.

- **Make sure both you and your students understand the differences between quality online resources and the "uncontrolled" parts of the Internet.**

Some faculty tell students not to use the Internet for their research. This is confusing because our full-text periodical or reference databases are accessed using Internet technology. These articles in the full-text databases are online copies of print copies, and are paid for by library subscriptions. In fact students have access to more quality resources if these are used in conjunction with print sources.

The "open" or "uncontrolled" portions of the Internet or Web certainly do need to be approached with skepticism. But there is also great information out there. Learning to evaluate each source is a valuable skill. Consider teaching this as part of your course.

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10 things you can do to improve research assignments

- 1. Offer student some direction in how to gain the necessary computer skills.**
- 2. Give research assignments in writing (not orally) to reduce confusion.**
If students have trouble understanding what they are supposed to do, they will have trouble doing it. Also, share the assignment with ACC librarians so they may better assist the students.
- 3. Check with the library to ensure you are asking your students to use current methods and resources.**
- 4. Avoid unclear or ambiguous assignments or instructions like "find something on the Internet" or "no online resources permitted."**
- 5. Avoid treasure hunts.** Make the assignment relate to real research.
- 6. Design your research assignments to foil cheaters.**
 - Have students turn in an outline or abstract that you review before the final paper is due.
 - Require documentation of sources.
 - Learn about Internet research-paper warehouses and how to track cheaters.
 - Try alternatives to research papers, such as annotated bibliographies, class presentations, pro and con arguments, etc.
- 7. Use the librarians.**
Bring your assignments to the library. Librarians can suggest current and appropriate resources for your assignment. Tell your students to ask for help.
- 8. Put yourself in the students' shoes.**
Test-drive your assignment before you have your students do it.
- 9. Help your students prepare for research.**
Students need to know:
 - research takes time
 - research requires planning
 - everything is not on the Internet - be clear about what types of Internet sources are acceptable.
- 10. Stress quality of information resources rather than their format.** The format of an information resource is less important than its credibility, accuracy, currency and appropriateness to the assignment.

**For more information, contact the librarians at your campus
or email library@austincc.edu**

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