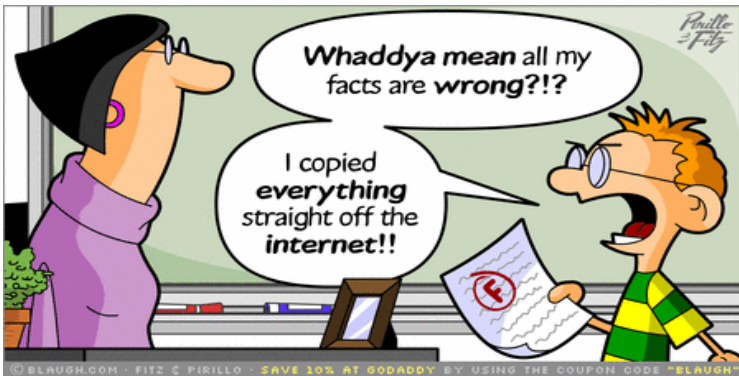


# Enhancing Student Information Literacy: Assignments to Build Information-Seeking Skills



[davidrothman.net/category/information-literacy/](http://davidrothman.net/category/information-literacy/)

David & Lorraine Cheng Library  
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Although the majority of our students are comfortable researching in an online environment, most are not aware of the Library's varied and diverse resources and rely too heavily on web resources that may not be appropriate for college level research. Many library resources are "web" based and students often choose the familiar resources of high school for the unfamiliar academic resources offered by the academic library. Technology may have made the research process easier, but it has also increased the amount of information that is readily available. Students need to develop skills in order to effectively locate, evaluate, organize and use information. Information literacy is more than finding and locating resources. Evaluating information based on the purpose or need of the project is a key element.

The following are examples of library-based assignments that can be adapted and used within any discipline or subject field. Most of the examples are intended to offer an alternative to the traditional term paper; although a variety of writing activities can be incorporated into the assignment. These assignments require students to explore, utilize and evaluate various library resources as well as Internet resources.

**Information skills are best learned when linked to course content.**

The University Core Curriculum program outcome #5 is directly related to information literacy. Students will be able to ...

*Formulate strategies to locate, evaluate, and apply information.*

In many cases the development of **information literacy skills is integrated with other skills such as critical thinking, technological literacy or quantitative literacy**. Where possible, these assignments illustrate ways to integrate the outcomes of the Core while at the same time promoting the development of information literacy skills. There are also many opportunities to integrate oral communication skills into these assignments. Information literacy best practices explicitly link information seeking skills to a specific purpose or need – which can include a class presentation, debate, or recording.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you to plan assignments that will help students develop their information literacy skills.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

Locate a specified number (and type) of sources on a topic and write descriptive or evaluative annotations using a discipline appropriate style (APA, MLA or other)

Objective: Students will become familiar with the process of locating and accessing library resources while also learning to critically evaluate resources. Students will also learn how to extract keywords, phrases or concepts from a topic and become accustomed to developing search strategies. Students will also become familiar with the format of a particular citation style. Requiring students to include scholarly articles, books, web pages and other types of sources will help them perfect their citation skills.

Information Literacy Skills:

- Use of the library online catalog to locate books.
- Use of at least one library database to locate journal articles.
- Include one or more web sites.
- Evaluate the source for relevancy.
- Prepare a citation for the source.

Technology Options:

- Export or place references into bibliographic management software such as RefWorks.
- Use the bibliographic management tools available within many of the Library's databases to develop bibliographies using a specific citation style.
- Use an assigned theme or issue, and create a shared bibliography of online readings. This could be done in Blackboard or with a shared RefWorks account.

Quantitative Literacy Options:

- Include statistical sources such as a table or graph as one of the sources.
- Use reports such as the Statistical Abstract of the United States or other compilations to locate a table related to the topic.
- Summarize the data in the table or graph in the annotated bibliography.

## **Compare and Contrast Sources**

Students locate one article published in a popular magazine and one article published in a scholarly journal on a related topic. Ask them to analyze the sources in terms of content, language and purpose.

Objective: Students will be able to explain the differences between popular and scholarly texts and describe the role and use of discipline specific journals.

- Use specialized/subject databases to locate articles.
- Recognize and document different types of publication formats.
- Develop evaluation, comparison and analytical skills.

Quantitative Literacy Options:

- Ask students to locate data on a specific topic from more than one source. This could be data presented in a research article, a government statistical source, a magazine article or data found on the web. Students can then compare and contrast the presentation of data on a specific topic.

## **Analysis of Database Results and Web Search Engine Results**

Students compare results of a search in an article database and on the web and discuss the results of their search in terms of what kinds of sources they found and the quality of the sources they found. Databases and search engines both have a role to play in the research process. The information literate student is able to know when and how to use sources based on the need.

Objective: Students will develop an understanding of the difference between the content available on the “free” web and content available in Library subscription databases.

Information Literacy Skills:

- Use library databases appropriate to the subject area.
- Develop appropriate search strategies by refining or revising search terms.
- Evaluate the results of a web search using established criteria.
- Evaluate the article located in a database based on established criteria.

Technology Options:

- Ask students to discuss the value and function of using different types of search tools when conducting research.
- Ask students to email one good article to the class or post the article in Blackboard for discussion.

Quantitative Literacy Options:

- Ask students to locate information using a dataset, such as census data by starting from the U.S. Census Bureau webpage. Then ask

students to locate the same information using Google or some other search engine.

## **Citation Examination**

Have students review a bibliography found in their textbooks (or alternate source). Ask students to identify what type of resource is denoted by each entry. You may also ask students to locate and obtain a copy of one (or several) of the listed sources. With the increasing availability of online resources, students often have difficulty identifying the type of source and therefore can't determine how to cite accurately.

Objectives: Students will learn to identify sources of information through citations and be able to differentiate among citations for books, journal and magazine articles and web sites. Students will also recognize the importance and value of utilizing a bibliography or works cited list in gathering additional sources of information on a particular topic.

Information Literacy Skills:

- Use citation information to locate additional information.
- Navigate library resources to determine availability of specific sources.
- Increase familiarity with scholarly resources and the importance of accurately citing sources.

Technology Options:

- Ask students to locate a known journal article in a research database such as Business Source Premier, PsycInfo or Sociological Abstracts.
- Many databases and Google Scholar include cited references/bibliography in the record. These can potentially be used to locate additional sources on a topic.

## **Opposing Viewpoints**

Select an issue or topic that offers the opportunity to defend or reject a particular position. Divide the class into two groups (pro or con) and have students gather evidence in support of their assigned position. Have students discuss their findings during an in-class debate.

Objectives: Students will learn to formulate search statements specific to their needs, identify and evaluate sources of information and use that information to construct arguments (pro or con).

Information Literacy Skills:

- State a research problem and articulate an information need.
- Organize and use information for a debate.

- Analyze and critically evaluate alternative sources of information and opinion.
- Use evidence to construct arguments.

Technology Options:

- Students representing the pro or con “side” can work together to summarize their arguments in one or two slides for a presentation.

Quantitative Literacy Options:

- Are crime rates increasing or decreasing? Are abortions among teenage women increasing or decreasing? Ask students to use statistical data such as tables from the US Statistical Abstract in support of their argument.
- If quantitative data are available, present data on their topic in a presentation for a designated audience.

## **Analyze a Study Published in a Scholarly Journal**

Select an article reporting the results of a scholarly study within a specific discipline. Provide students with a rubric showing the criteria for evaluating a research study. Ask students to identify and describe the various elements of the article including the literature review, hypothesis, variables, methodology, population, data analysis, findings, citation style (as appropriate to the discipline) and then to comment critically in the study.

Objectives: Students will be introduced to the scholarly communication and research methodologies of the discipline.

Information Literacy Skills:

- Use an appropriate library database to locate and retrieve a study; use search terms appropriate to the discipline.
- Summarize information in an organized manner.
- Identify valid and invalid arguments.
- Summarize and interpret data as presented in the study.

Technology Options:

- Students can share and discuss articles through posting in Blackboard.
- If students are all working on the same general topic, their combined efforts can be re-organized as a literature review.

Quantitative Literacy

- Explain & analyze the information presented in the data presented by the study.

## **Persona in a Debate**

Have students in the class adopt a role as a specific player in a debate. For example, an economics class might debate issues pertaining to reforming health care. One student/or team can represent the physician, another can be the patient, another the insurance company, etc. The students can focus their research around a specific persona and present arguments based on that perspective. This can be both a group and individual project with each student preparing a written summary of their research in addition to participation in the debate. The debate can be videotaped.

**Objective:** Students can focus their research and analyze and issue from a particular perspective. The debate format provides an opportunity to present arguments and evidence in support of their persona's point of view.

**Information Literacy Skills:**

- Use appropriate databases to locate selected articles on a specific issue.
- Identify relevant web pages or organizations such as the American Medical Association or the Insurance Industry or AARP that might provide data to support the perspective of a senior citizen, a physician, an insurance industry executive.
- Summarize and organize findings in preparation for a debate.

**Technology Options:**

- Videotaping (consider ethical issues such as securing permission for taping from all of the participants – this is especially an issue if the material could end up on the Internet).

## **Nature of Evidence**

Begin with a simple statement or hypothesis, such as “Child Poverty is a major problem in the U.S”. Each student will be asked to find and bring to class at least two pieces of evidence to support or contradict the statement. This evidence can be in the form of an article in a newspaper or magazine, a speech or presentation, a research study, a government statistical report or other source, interview with an expert or some other relevant source. Students can discuss their evidence in teams or with the entire class, explore contradictory information and discuss criteria for evaluating this information.

**Information Literacy Skills:**

- Use a variety of sources to locate information on a specific topic.
- Analyze information based on specific criteria.
- Compare and contrast information from different sources.

- Discuss reliability and validity of evidence.

Technological Literacy:

- Keep a log of the path used to locate the evidence and discuss any problems with the search process.

Quantitative Literacy Options:

- Are crime rates increasing or decreasing? Are abortions among teenage women increasing or decreasing? Ask students to consider the use of data as evidence.
- Ask students to make judgments about a trend based on the data.

## **What do the numbers mean?**

Using tables from a standard statistical source, such as the Statistical Abstract of the U.S., students can locate a table on a specific topic (crime in the U.S., foreign aid, teen pregnancy, demographic changes etc. and analyze the data as reported. Students can develop a list of possible research questions based on the data.

Objective: Introduce students to sources of quantitative data. Students learn to locate, analyze and evaluate the reliability and validity of the data. Students learn to use published data as appropriate to support an argument.

Information Literacy Skills:

- Locate statistical data from a standard source.
- Interpret a table using all relevant headers and footnotes.
- Develop possible research questions based on the data.

Technology Options:

- Use the online version of the Statistical Abstract, download data into Excel, and create a graph to illustrate the meaning of the table.

Quantitative Literacy Options:

- Students should explain the information presented in the data source.
- Ask students to make judgments about the data presented and to draw conclusions based on the data.

## **Community Analysis**

Select a municipality in the United States and prepare a statistical overview of that community including demographic, economic, education, health, energy use and other desired variables.

#### Information Literacy Skills:

- Locate statistical data on a community using a variety of published sources.
- Evaluate data sources based on selected criteria.
- Include historical data to analyze changes in that community over a specified time period.
- Organize the data into a structured presentation (report, presentation, webpage).
- Prepare a bibliography of statistical sources to accompany a report or presentation.

#### Technology Options:

- Use a spreadsheet or database management tool to organize the data.
- Prepare a slide presentation on the selected community.

#### Quantitative Literacy Options:

- Prepare a chronology of events or trends in the community.
- Develop a graph or chart about the community for a specific audience.

### **Become Familiar with the Journals in a Discipline**

Have students select a journal (s) from a list of journals in the discipline and review the content of each over the last 2 volumes or years. (Make sure the library has access to the journals). Based on this review, each student could report on the content and audience for each journal and identify some of the research trends.

#### Information Literacy Skills:

- Locate journals by title (for example, find an article in the Harvard Business Review).
- Become familiar with the research trends in a discipline.
- Summarize findings and share with other students.

#### Technology Options:

- These summaries could easily be shared within Blackboard. Students could identify areas for possible research projects.

### **A Week in the Life of...**

Students can select an individual (historical, contemporary, real or imaginary) and research the events and issues of the time and develop & present a portrait of that individual. This could fit any discipline – what would it have been like to be an artist during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe or a worker in one of the first steel mills, etc.

#### Information Literacy Skills:

- Use a variety of resources (books, articles, newspapers, including primary sources to provide evidence of what it would have been like to have lived at a specific point in time.
- Prepare citations for the resources used.
- Discuss issues concerning copyright and plagiarism.
- Think creatively to find evidence that would make the presentation interesting.

#### Technology Options:

- Develop a PowerPoint presentation incorporating sound, media, images, artwork to illustrate the life of this individual.
- Develop a course webpage where the results of the student research can be shared.
- Discuss issues concerning copyright and plagiarism.

### **Class Poster Session**

Working individually or in teams, students develop poster sessions on a course-related topic or research project. This assignment could also require students to report on the results of a survey or experiment conducted for the class. Require students to document sources or to include the literature review used for the project. This assignment could easily be adapted to simulate a presentation at a professional conference or to a specified audience providing students an opportunity to practice their oral communication skills.

#### Information Literacy Skills:

- Use information for a specific purpose such as to educate others.
- Locate relevant information sources of all types and provide accurate documentation.
- Select best sources based on the purpose of the project.

#### Technology Options:

- Design a webpage or pamphlet to complement the poster session.
- Address copyright issues associated with the use of sources.

### **Maintain a Weekly Journal/Blog Based on Readings on a Specific Topic/Problem**

Students choose or are assigned a topic based on the content of the course. Throughout the semester, students read a variety of materials and write commentary or analysis based on their readings. This journal can include images in addition to the text. Throughout the semester and/or at the end of the semester, students prepare a summary of what they have learned and These readings can provide the basis for a literature review or research paper.

#### Information Literacy Skills:

- Use information for a specific purpose.
- Locate relevant information sources of all types and provide accurate documentation.

#### Technology Options:

- Maintain an online journal or blog using Blackboard or other tools.

### **Interview**

Students prepare for an interview with (a community leader, a family member, an entrepreneur, an immigrant, a senior citizen, a person with a specific career, etc.). They develop a set of interview questions based on research into the background of the individual, their position in society, their area of expertise, a research question, etc. Students can prepare a written summary of what they learned, provide a transcript of the questions and answers, prepare a brief biography or prepare an oral history. Students write a comparative essay comparing the experiences of the interviewee with their own experiences.

#### Information Literacy Skills:

- Research the individual, their career, what life was like when they were of college age...
- Locate relevant information sources of all types and provide accurate documentation for citation.
- Learn how to cite interviews, recordings, email messages, and text messages.

#### Technology Options:

- Use recording devices (cassettes, CD, mobile phones) to record interviews.
- Use email, texts to conduct interview.

For additional information, please contact  
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Kathy Malanga at [malangak@wpunj.edu](mailto:malangak@wpunj.edu) or  
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To schedule a library instruction session, please contact  
Leah Zamora at [zamoral2@wpunj.edu](mailto:zamoral2@wpunj.edu) or call ext 2663.

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