10 Tips for Effective Information Literacy Assignments

1. Encourage your students to do some preliminary research before deciding on a topic. Choosing a manageable topic for a research assignment is, in itself, an information literacy skill. Will your students know how to revise a topic that is too broad or too narrow?

2. Define the types of sources you want your students to use. Don’t assume students understand the meaning of terms such as “periodical,” “peer-reviewed,” “primary source,” “scholarly journal,” etc.

3. Avoid giving instructions such as, “Do not use the internet.” Many students interpret this to mean that all online research tools, including library databases, are off-limits. Is it really necessary to discourage or prohibit the use of an internet search engine such as Google? If so, inform your students as to why you have made this decision.

4. Be sure your students have access to the resources you want them to use. Don’t assume the library has everything your students will need. Consult with a librarian well in advance to arrange for the availability of appropriate materials.

5. Be aware that many libraries can no longer sustain extensive print collections and must increasingly rely on electronic resources. Avoid scavenger hunts, and assignments that require students to find information in outdated formats.

6. Consider requiring students to document their research process. What research tools did they use? What search terms did they try, and which search statements generated the best results? How did they revise their search strategies? On what criteria did they base their choice of sources?

7. Specify how you want your students to use the information you are asking them to find. What will the final product look like? Will it be a research paper, a presentation, a video, an infographic? You might want to consider a different kind of assignment, such as having your students edit a Wikipedia article.

8. Clarify what constitutes plagiarism. Do your students understand what plagiarism is, and how to avoid it?

9. Provide the opportunity for students to learn how to use research tools effectively, and how to evaluate the sources they retrieve. Do students know that they can ask a librarian for assistance? Might your class benefit from an information literacy session conducted by a librarian? (Request a session at https://goo.gl/siQrRz)

10. Remember that the best research assignments are those that “ask students to look at information critically – to evaluate it, to compare it with other information, to synthesize information from different sources, [and] to identify the most crucial pieces of information available.”

   --Drew University (https://users.drew.edu/~jcaldwel/assign.html)

For more information about information literacy, and about library resources and services for MDC Faculty, visit http://libraryguides.mdc.edu/facultysupport.

See an infographic version of this handout at https://goo.gl/scWqhe.