Effective Research Assignments: Best Practices  
Ingram Library, University of West Georgia

Related Web Resource: http://libguides.westga.edu/researchassignments

Adapted from the handout "Tips for Designing Library Research Assignments," developed by Sarah McDaniel of the Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. www.library.wisc.edu/services/teaching-learning-services/designing-library-research-assignments/

Identify Learning Goals.
Consider:
- What abilities would you like students to develop through the assignment?
- How will the learning goals and their importance be communicated in the assignment?
- Clarify Expectations.

Note: The LEAP Initiatives’ Essential Learning Outcomes may spark ideas about learning goals and outcomes. (see www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes)

Clarify Expectations.
Your students may not have prior experience with academic research and resources. State (in writing) details like:
- the assignment's purpose,
- the purpose of using sources and doing research for the assignment,
- suggested resources for locating relevant sources,
- expected citation practices,
- terminology that may be unclear (e.g. Define terms like "database," "peer reviewed"),
- assignment length and other parameters, and
- grading/evaluation criteria

Also consider discussing how research is produced and disseminated in your discipline, and how you expect your students to participate in academic discourse in the context of your class.

"Scaffold" the Assignment.
Breaking a complex research assignment down into a sequence of smaller, more manageable parts:
- models how to approach a research question and how to manage time effectively,
- empowers students to focus on and to master key research and critical thinking skills,
- provides opportunities for feedback, and
- deters plagiarism.

Periodic class discussions about the assignment can also help students
- reflect on the research process and its importance
- encourage questions, and
- help students develop a sense that what they are doing is a transferable process that they can use for other assignments.

Test the Assignment.
By testing an assignment, you may identify practical roadblocks (e.g., too few copies of a book for too many students, a source is no longer available online).
Librarians can help with this process (e.g., suggest research strategies or resources, design customized supporting materials like handouts or course research guides)

Collaborate with Librarians.
Subject librarians can explore with you ways to support students in their research!
- Find your subject librarian: www.westga.edu/library/index_12604.php
- More about the Library’s instruction and reference services: libguides.westga.edu/faculty/instruction