

Research Assignment Planning Toolkit for Faculty

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Introduction

This toolkit is a companion to [*Designing Research Assignments that Enhance Student Research Skills: A Reflective Handbook for Faculty in Higher Education*](#), by Kathleen Oakey. Access the handbook for additional activities and tips for improving your research assignment design.

Any links embedded in this document have been written in full in the footnotes.

For accessibility options for Google Docs, please go to:

<https://support.google.com/docs/answer/6282736?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop>

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If you have found this resource helpful, please let me know how it has enriched your practice. Email: kathleen.oakey@sheridancollege.ca

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Reflection Questions

Understanding Research Skills

Research skills encompass the practices, habits of mind, and conceptual understandings that are required for finding, analysing, and using information ethically in source-based research activities for academic purposes. Information literacy and its interrelated literacies provide a helpful framework for developing research skills. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) have articulated 6 frames or threshold concepts that are particularly troublesome for students to grasp. Research assignments offer an excellent way for students to deepen their understanding of these concepts by applying them in new contexts.

How do you think research practices have changed for students over the past 10 years? In what ways has technology made it easier? In what ways has technology made it more difficult?

How well do you think your students find, analyse, produce, and share information in their personal lives? In their academic work? What hinders or helps them?

How do students benefit from research activities in your course or program?

What information literacy concepts do you still struggle with understanding or explaining? What would you like to learn more about?

Students as Learners

Research skills are often affected by a number of key factors, such as the course, program level, or disciplinary background of the student, their previous knowledge and understanding of research, their stage of transition from novice to expert, their identity as a researcher, as well as their affective response to research which may be influenced by the demands of external obligations.

How do students typically respond when given a research project in your course? What might their response indicate about their previous research experiences?

What future research opportunities does your assignment prepare students for – academically and professionally? How will this assignment prepare students for these future activities?

How is research in your discipline unique (e.g., purpose, outputs, types of sources, etc.)? How can your research assignment help highlight these unique qualities?

How do you hope students will feel about research upon completion of your assignment? What can you do to help generate that response?

Applying Teaching and Learning Strategies

To prepare for a research-based assessment, it's important to consider the teaching and learning strategies you will employ to address academic integrity, motivation, artificial intelligence, troublesome tasks, metacognition, and connections to support systems for students.

What tasks do you think students most struggle with when completing their assignments? Why might this be?

To what extent do you think students' research skills improve with each research activity? What strategies have supported or hindered their growth in the past?

What steps can you take to improve the learning experience for students?

Developing Assignment Instructions

Your assignment instructions help guide students as they complete their work. Effective assignment instructions clearly articulate their purpose and the skills students will learn, list the steps students will need to complete, provide instructions for research topics, identify appropriate sources, outline academic integrity guidelines and style guides, and offer criteria for success.

What aspects of developing the assignment instructions do you most struggle with?
Who could you collaborate with to improve your instructions? (e.g., Library, Writing/Learning Centre, colleagues?)

How can you further clarify or focus your assignment tasks on the purpose and learning outcomes you have identified for the project?



Research Assignment Planning Guide

Adapted from *Understanding by Design*, by Wiggins and McTighe, 2016.

Step 1: Consider the Context

<p>What research activities have students previously completed in the course or program?</p>	<p>What future research activities will this activity prepare them for (academically or professionally)?</p>
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Step 2: Identify Purpose & Goals

<p>What Information Literacy Frame(s) will be the focus of this activity? See ACRL Framework¹</p>	<p>What should students know or be able to do by the end of the research activity? See Bloom's Taxonomy²</p>
<p>What course learning objectives will the research activity meet?</p>	

¹ <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

² https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/sites/default/files/uploads/files/cognitive_domain_-_blooms_taxonomy.pdf

Step 3: Determine Evidence of Learning

How will students demonstrate their learning (e.g., what will they create)?	
What tasks will students need to complete?	What criteria will you evaluate students on?

Step 4: Develop Instructional Strategies

What concepts or tasks will be particularly troublesome for students?	What are the learning activities, instructional strategies, and support services you will use to support learning?
What considerations for equity, diversity, & inclusion apply? See UDL Guidelines ³	

³<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>



Research Assignment Checklist

The activity:

- Reflects course objectives and disciplinary methodologies.
- Develops at least one information literacy frame from the ACRL Framework.
- Uses a variety of strategies that encourage academic integrity (e.g., portions are completed in-class, requires students to disclose the use of software tools, requires multiple drafts).
- Includes engaging elements (e.g., authentic rhetorical situations, a real-world audience, cultural relevance, or a critical lens).
- Promotes accessibility and inclusiveness of all students (e.g., students are offered choices in topics and how they present their findings, transcripts or closed captioning are required).
- Provides opportunities for students to reflect on the research resources, processes, and strategies they used throughout the activity.

The instruction sheet:

- Clearly states the purpose as well as meaningful skills and knowledge practices that students will develop by completing the activity.
- Provides feasible research topics or detailed instructions for students developing their own topics.
- Provides information about how to complete the activity (e.g., lists tasks, suggests appropriate types of sources, where to find sources, links to library supports)?
- Provides criteria for success.
- Conveys confidence that students can, with effort and integrity, successfully meet the high standards set by the project.

To prepare for the activity, you plan to:

- Consult with a librarian regarding the topics and recommended sources, as well as to identify potentially troublesome tasks.
- Provide opportunities to reflect, share, and build on previous knowledge and understanding about research practices.
- Provide opportunities to practise tasks that may be troublesome (e.g., formative activities, scaffolded activities, or chunking larger projects).
- Help students access expertise from across the college, either through links to services or inviting experts from different areas of your institution into the classroom.
- Address common affective responses to research as well as the additional obligations that students will find themselves navigating throughout the course.



Research Assignment Instructions Rubric

	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Limited
Purpose	The purpose is clear and focused, closely tied to course objectives, and articulates well-defined and attainable skills and knowledge practices related to information literacy.	Defines the purpose in general terms. Skills and knowledge practices that will be gained are appropriate for the context.	Purpose of the assignment is somewhat unclear or confusing. Development of skills and knowledge practices is minimal.	Inappropriate or insufficient description of purpose.
Tasks	Tasks are interesting, clear, and require students to wrestle with information literacy concepts. Tasks align well with the stated purpose and learning outcomes of the assignment, highlight the unique characteristics of the discipline, and demonstrate sensitivity to diverse learners.	Tasks are outlined in detail and are appropriate to the stated purpose and learning outcomes of the assignment. Some evidence of the unique characteristics of the discipline.	Provides minimal or somewhat confusing description of tasks and/or tasks may not align well with the stated purpose and learning outcomes of the assignment. Minimal evidence of the unique characteristics of the discipline.	Inappropriate or insufficient description of tasks.
Research Topics	Research topics are interesting, feasible, well-defined, appropriate to the discipline, with clear guidance on how to narrow or approach the topic. Demonstrates sensitivity to diverse learners.	Research topics are appropriate for the context and provide some guidance on how to narrow or approach the topic.	Research topics are briefly defined, with minimal guidance on how to narrow or approach the topic.	Inappropriate or insufficient description of research topics.
Sources	Types of sources required are appropriate, available and accessible, described in detail,	Sources are well described, are appropriate for the purpose and tasks, with some guidance on	Sources are briefly described with minimal guidance on how to get started and where to find	Inappropriate or insufficient description of

	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Limited
	and closely tied to the purpose and tasks, with detailed guidance on how to get started and where to find support.	how to get started and where to find support.	support.	sources.
Academic Integrity	Academic integrity is well defined and specific to the assignment. Expectations clearly align with the purpose and learning outcomes of the assignment. Provides detailed guidance on where to find support.	Academic integrity is well defined with links to institutional policies. Includes guidance on where to find support.	Academic integrity is briefly mentioned in broad terms with minimal guidance on where to find support.	Inappropriate or insufficient description of academic integrity and/or where to find support.
Criteria for Success	Criteria for success is clearly articulated, comprehensive, and aligns with the stated purpose and learning outcomes of the assessment. Emphasis is placed on students' ability to find, select, and synthesize information.	Describes the criteria for success in detail. Aligns well with the stated purpose and learning outcomes of the assessment. Some focus on the process of finding, selecting, and synthesizing information is evident.	Provides limited description of the criteria for success or alignment with stated purpose and learning outcomes of the assessment.	Inappropriate or insufficient description of criteria for success.
Language & Tone	The language used is clear, supports information literacy concepts, and demonstrates sensitivity to diverse learners. The tone is positive, inviting, and conveys confidence in students' ability to successfully complete the assignment.	The instructions are written with clarity, in a positive tone. Some support for information literacy concepts is evident. Conveys confidence in students' ability to successfully complete the assignment.	Some ambiguous or confusing language is evident. Tone at times may be somewhat jarring to some users.	Inappropriate or insufficient language or tone.