

Guidelines for Assignments that Build Information Competence

The PBCC Library excels in providing not only information resources but the professionals who can grease the wheels of a learning activity. Librarians can identify resources, write information literacy objectives, and work with faculty to develop active learning and learner-centered assignments. Well-designed assignments help to create a positive learning experience that builds confidence and information competence.

- **Communicate with a librarian** to assure availability of and access to required resources. The library environment is dynamic and print and electronic resources change. Visit, phone or e-mail a Reference Librarian. Place limited materials on reserve at the Reserve Desk.
- **Share a copy of your assignment.** Leave a copy of your assignment at the Reference Desk to help librarians assist students in achieving the assignment learning objectives.
- **Assumptions about the basics.** Many students have not had experience using a library or its resources. The Internet may be the only resource a student knows about for finding information. Encourage your students to talk with a librarian, schedule a library session for your class, or prepare an assignment that requires library use.
- **Test the assignment.** Before giving it to your students, test the assignment by doing it yourself. This will help to identify potential rough spots, for example, insufficient resources.
- **Write learning objectives.** Explain what students are expected to learn, how it relates to the course subject matter and what you want them to accomplish. Determine if the assignment will lead to a better understanding of the subject.
- **Give specific instructions.** For example: paper length and style; format for references, e.g. MLA, APA; acceptable types of sources, e.g. books, magazine articles, web sites.
- **Provide examples.** Students may not be familiar with the differences between popular and scholarly sources. If you ask students to find and use articles from peer reviewed journals, provide examples, discuss the author's credentials, and the elements of a scholarly research article.
- **Topic selection.** Students may have difficulty forming a research question. Consider an exercise that asks students to write a research question for a number of news headlines or examine the *Opposing Viewpoint* series for sample research questions and ideas.
- **Allow for revisions.** Allow students to choose a topic early in the semester and compile a bibliography of initial sources. Ask students to evaluate, analyze or comment as part of the revision process and then turn in a revised topic statement. This process will encourage critical analysis and the incorporation of new information into the student's knowledge base.
- **Use of the Web.** Internet use is expanding and library materials are increasingly web-based. Students come to the Reference Desk and state that "they are not allowed to use web sources", however, a sizable portion of library magazines, journals and newspapers are delivered through library subscription services on the Web. In your instructions for student use of the Web, reinforce the distinction between reliable library subscription sources and general "internet" searching.
- **Request library instruction.** Scheduling instruction close to the time of need facilitates the learning process. When the library session is tied to a course assignment, students can apply what they are learning during the session. Request library instruction for your class at: www.pbcc.edu/forms/instruction_request.htm

This document was prepared by Connie Tuisku, Librarian/Associate Professor, and adapted for use with permission from California State University, Fullerton.