

Term Paper Alternatives: Ideas for Information-Based Assignments

- ❖ Students practice information skills, with less plagiarism
- ❖ Makes information skills/the scholarship process explicit

- 1) Conduct the research for a term paper. Do everything except write it. At various stages, students submit: topic clearly defined, annotated bibliography of useful sources, outline of paper, thesis statement, opening paragraph and summary.
- 2) Annotated bibliography. Find a specified number of sources on a topic and write descriptive or evaluative annotations for each source.
- 3) Review the literature on a specific topic for a given time period. Students identify appropriate articles and use them to describe the current thinking or research on a topic.
- 4) Give students a literature review article which was written a number of years ago and they update that review.
- 5) Research a topic and present it as a poster to present at a conference, or as a brochure for some specific audience.
- 6) Explore through book reviews, biographical information, and indexes how and why a work becomes a "classic." What effect does a classic work have on a discipline?
- 7) Select a present day issue or concern. Search the past literature at 5 or 10-year intervals. How have theories or attitudes toward the issue changed?
- 8) Forecasting in retrospect. What did articles written in some time period, for example, the 1960s, predict about the future of some topic, like computers. Did the forecasts come true or not? Why?
- 9) Students choose (or are assigned) a scholar/researcher. Explore that person's career and ideas by locating biographical information, preparing a bibliography of the scholar's writings, analyzing the reaction of the scholarly community to the researcher's work.
- 10) How many journals in a given field does the library carry? Identify (with professor's help) journals "basic" to the discipline. Compare and contrast them. Analyze their content, tone, audience and impact.
- 11) Compare and contrast primary and secondary sources on the same topic.
- 12) Find a short article in the popular press and the original research on which the popular article was based. Discuss the relationship between the popular article and the original research, and critique the accuracy of the popular article.

- 13) Prepare a grant or research proposal, or a marketing or business plan. State the specific problem to be solved or task to be accomplished. Provide background on the problem. How have these issues been dealt with in the past? What is the current thinking on this issue? How do you propose to solve the problem or what are the questions you need to ask to solve the problem? What support can you offer for your solution?
- 14) Examine the credibility of a major monograph in the field. Who wrote it? What are the author's credentials? What is the point of view of the book? Find three reviews of it and compare them.
- 15) Locate and read [three, four, etc.] reviews of a work. Do the reviews vary? If so, why? What viewpoints, biases or assumptions do the reviewers exhibit?
- 16) Read the articles cited in a research paper. Explain how each is related to the paper. In what circumstances is it appropriate to cite other papers? What different purposes do the citations serve?
- 17) Examine the treatment of a controversial issue or event in several sources [newspapers, editorials, magazines, scholarly journals, journals from different disciplines, association websites, etc.].
- 18) Examine a small number of items such as books, articles, or websites. Establish indicators of quality, where these indicators are found, and the appropriate use for each item.
- 19) What does "the literature" of a particular discipline look like? What comprises it? Investigate the production and dissemination of information in a given discipline. How and by whom is the knowledge produced? How and in which media or format is it presented or communicated? What is the publishing cycle? How important is informal communication in the field? How important is grey literature? How do people keep abreast of new information in this field? (They could possibly interview faculty members to learn about this.)
- 20) Create a website or Wikipedia entry to introduce others to a topic
- 21) Provide a precise statement of a search topic, a list of keywords and synonyms and comparable thesaurus terms as appropriate, and an outline of search logic to search a periodicals database. Justify the choice of database. Perform the search. Analyze the results, revise search strategy and perform the more effective search.
- 22) Compare Internet search engine and periodical database searches using identical search statements. Print the initial search results and compare the findings. Revise and search each source again. Compare the final results.

List compiled by Charlotte Gerstein, Reference & Instruction Librarian, Castleton State College, based on various other libraries' lists of similar suggestions.

