

Redesign Your Writing & Research Assignments

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Goals for this session

- Share best practices for flexible and resilient research and writing assignment design
- Provide opportunity for participants to share experiences, ideas, and concerns
- Answer questions you may have about your course assignments

Tips on effective research and writing assignment design

Tip 1: Backward design

- Start with your learning outcomes
 - What [information literacy learning outcomes](#) are relevant to your course and learning goals?
 - Some common FY learning outcomes we used to guide our teaching in F2019:
 - Understanding the range of available sources (e.g. scholarly to popular)
 - Retrieving/accessing known items (Get It button, call numbers, ILL, etc.)
 - Developing search strategies (keywords and subject terms, search mechanics, locating background information, etc.)
 - Distinguishing among different search tools (broad tools to discipline-specific ones)
 - Source evaluation
 - Recognizing that research is an iterative process

Tip 1: Backward design

- Demonstrate understanding of field's discourse conventions
- Participate in scholarly conversation
- Make connections among course concepts
- Apply course concepts to new material or context
- Convey research findings
- Participate in scholarly conversation
- Make compelling argument
- Communicate original research or thought
- Analysis and critique of research methods
- Demonstrate understanding of the material
- Demonstrate deep critical engagement with material
- Perform close reading
- Apply theoretical lens
- Summarize and synthesize existing research
- Make evidence-based recommendations
- Elucidate and define problems
- (Re)contextualize primary source materials

Tip 2: Articulate assignment requirements

- Be clear on purpose of assignment and expectations
 - Why are students being asked to research and write? How is the assignment connected to the course learning goals? Be explicit.
 - Deadlines, citation style, length of paper, etc. Provide examples.
- Define your terms
 - Source types, research tools, etc.
 - Communicate how student work will be evaluated

Tip 3: Scaffold the research and writing process

Topic selection	Research proposal / prospectus Free writing Concept map
Research	Working bibliography Research journal / log
Source evaluation	Literature review Annotated bibliography Read map
Draft	Outline First draft
Revision	Peer review Meta-statement / reflection Final draft

*Adapted with permission from “Assignment Scaffolding,” by Allyson Skene and Sarah Fedko, Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Toronto. Retrieved from: <https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/technology/assignment-scaffolding>.

Online Community Analysis

The last project asked you to look critically at your own digital writing practices; this one asks you to look critically at the practices of others. As we've discussed in class, your task here is to identify an online community—either one you are a part of or one you find potentially interesting—and study how they communicate.

Because you are doing original research, by the time you are done with this paper you will actually be the biggest expert in the world on your very specific topic: no one will have looked as closely and critically at this aspect of this specific community as you will have. Rad, right? Your assignment, therefore, is to write a **4000–4500-word academic research article** on the communication practices of your online community. (Take heart: scholarly conventions for an article like this tell you what to write for a decent portion of that length.)

Generally speaking, scholarly articles examining these kinds of questions tend follow a similar outline: **introduction** with **exigence, claim/thesis**, and, usually, **signposts; background**, possibly combined with **literature review; methodology; case study**; and **conclusion**. See Appendix II at the end of the prompt for a breakdown of what belongs in each of these sections, and don't be afraid to use subheadings where useful.

Online Community Analysis

Proposal

This proposal is not a contract—research projects evolve as you learn. But it is an opportunity to make sure that everyone has A) gotten the ball rolling, and B) rolled it in a productive direction.

- What community do you want to study, and why?
- What is your level of experience/familiarity with this community?
- What angle do you think you might take? Tell me more.
- What's your "so what?" Why should anyone care?

Ann. bibliography

The goal is for you to develop a sense of the scholarly conversation that is already happening on and around your topic and begin to identify where your research might fit in.

- In the first paragraph, summarize the source.
- In the second paragraph, evaluate the source in the context of your research and the scholarly conversation as laid out in the rest of your sources. What are the strengths/most useful parts of the discussion, and why? How does this article relate to your other sources? *How do you think you will use it?*

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Tip 4: Build in research and writing support

- Do not assume all students in your courses have the same library knowledge or research experience
- Build in support from your colleagues in the library and writing center
 - Library
 - Asynchronous/synchronous instruction
 - Research help desk/research appointments
 - Renovated classroom
 - Writing Center
 - Online & in-person
 - Guest speakers

Quick Write

- Overall goals
 - What do you want students to get out of doing the assignment?
 - What are you trying to use this assignment to learn?
- Format
 - Why is this a research assignment?
 - Why is it a written paper?
 - Does it need to be an “academic paper”? Who is the audience for this?

Please contact us if you have any questions or would like to discuss your course assignments in more detail.

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Learn more

- Head, A.J. & Eisenberg, M.B. (2010). “[Assigning Inquiry: How Handouts for Research Assignments Guide Today’s College Students,](#)” Project Information Literacy Progress Report.
- [Musselman Library Information Literacy Goals](#)
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2016). [Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.](#)
- Conference on College Composition and Communication [statement on effective online teaching of writing](#)