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6-2021

### Course Topic Bracket Lesson Plan

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#### Recommended Citation

Ilett, Darren, "Course Topic Bracket Lesson Plan" (2021). *Information Literacy*. 25.  
<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/infolit/25>

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## Course Topic Bracket Lesson Plan

### Purpose

This lesson plan uses a March Madness style bracket to choose an example course topic in a credit information literacy course. Students propose topics and then vote to narrow them down to the group's favorite. Students then act as research consultants to develop a sample research project on the topic the group selected. The subsequent tasks illustrate research processes for the students. However, students still select individual research topics for their own work.

### Note

This activity and the subsequent tasks related the selected topic provide cohesion for the course, give everyone a common theme to discuss as they learn about research processes, and increase student buy-in and enthusiasm. However, this does require more preparation time because the examples the instructor uses must be created anew for each course's chosen topic.

### Learning Outcomes

- Describe the characteristics of an effective research topic
- Choose a research topic as a group based on those characteristics

### Time Needed

15-20 minutes

### Materials

- 2 index cards or pieces of scratch paper for each student
- An online discussion application, such as [Padlet](#) or [Google Jamboard](#), can be used instead of index cards or scratch paper
- An electronic or print bracket document like the image below
- Computer with internet access and projector or document camera
- Bracket could be drawn on a white board or chalkboard if technology is unavailable

### Procedure

- Explain purpose of activity to students. Emphasize that this will be the example topic throughout the course and that they will serve as research consultants to make it into a successful research project.
- Also let students know that they will still get to choose individual topics for their own work later.
- Distribute an index card or piece of scratch paper to all students or provide link to an online discussion application.
- Ask students to write down any topic that they would be uncomfortable discussing in class for whatever reason. No names need to be included in the responses. If a student doesn't have any such topics, they can write N/A. This step gives students an opportunity to list any topics that may be triggering for them.

- Share the results of the previous step with the class so that no one later proposes a topic that others have identified as uncomfortable or triggering.
- Brainstorm as a group what makes for a good research topic. These may be characteristics such as: impacts many people’s lives, is of interest to many people, relates to current events, is an urgent problem, has many or conflicting solutions, has published research related to it, etc.
- Distribute a second index card or piece of scratch paper to all students or provide link to online discussion application.
- Ask each student to write down a topic they would like to propose for the course, reminding them of the characteristics of a good research topic and the triggering topics mentioned by students. You can add any parameters that make sense for your course, such as requiring that topics be related to a particular discipline. No names are necessary on the suggestions.
- Project a digital copy of the bracket, use a document camera to project a paper copy, or draw the bracket on a white board or chalkboard (before class). Fill out the outer columns of the bracket with students’ suggestions. Depending on the number of students, you may need to add a few suggestions of your own, ask students to suggest more than one topic, or—with groups of more than 16—ask pairs of students to suggest a topic together. To have a successful bracket, you will need 2, 4, 8, 16, or 32 topics before you begin voting.
- Students can make a short pitch for their topics as you write them into the bracket—to convince other students that their topic is a good one.
- Go through the bracket, naming 2 topics at a time and asking students to vote for whichever of the 2 they prefer.
- Keep voting until you have selected the winning topic.
- Throughout the rest of the course, use this topic as the example and complete tasks together as a group, with the students serving as research consultants. The following tasks could be completed as a group:
  - Identifying types of literature related to the topic
  - Searching for relevant sources
  - Reading and understanding sources
  - Focusing the topic
  - Writing a research question
  - Finding themes in the literature
  - Making an argument using evidence, etc.

**Example of a Bracket**

