

Planning Checklist: Research Assignments

It is important to collaborate with librarians, anticipate student stumbling blocks, and have a list of resources ready to guide students successfully through the research process. Use this checklist to create effective research assignments.

ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS

General Assignment Considerations

- Relate assignments to some aspect of course subject matter or learning objectives.
- Increase understanding of both the subject and the process for locating information with the structured assignment.

Encourage Time Management

- Scaffold assignment activities to build upon each other, culminating in the final project.
- Provide a timeline and set deadlines which allow students sufficient time for exploration, research, drafts and final production.

Assignment Specifications

- Experiment with short, less-complex essays or projects instead of a term paper (article summaries, scholarly paper analysis, annotated bibliographies, videos, eportfolios, etc.) and specify the number of sources required.
- Avoid strict and burdensome limits (too many restrictions at once such as publication date, word counts, material type can make research nearly impossible for students).
- Set reasonable expectations about the use of print sources versus online sources (sometimes, the most recent information is no longer available in print, e.g. many government publications are now only online).

Examples and Grading

- Provide examples of exemplary research projects.
- Provide a detailed grading rubric to avoid bias and establish instructor expectations.

Involve a librarian in the process

- Contact your [Library Liaison](#) to confirm research exists and identify the best resources for your course assignments.
- Require each student to research a different topic to ensure the library offers enough print resources.
- Suggest sources that align with students' levels (reading ability, knowledge of subject matter, and search skills).

RESEARCH GUIDANCE Provide a link to the MCC Library: <https://www.mesacc.edu/library>

Getting Started (General Knowledge / Research Process and Questions)

- Understand the Research Process (e.g. [Research Process](#), [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy](#))
- Define research assignment terminology so that it does not create ambiguity (e.g. handouts state that students cannot use the Internet yet students must locate articles in the library's databases).

Searching for Information

- Explain the difference between using MCC library resources, Google, wikipedia, etc.
- Recommend and require specific sources (subject library databases, reference materials, scholarly sources, etc.)
- Review search strategies (Boolean operators, full-text, scholarly limiters, advanced searching, subject searching)
- Permit students to change their topics based on the reality of their research experience.

Evaluating Information

- Require appropriate authority, content, and timeliness (use [evaluation tools](#) such as the CRAAP test or SIFT Method).
- Explain the difference between information sources (scholarly journals, magazines, newspapers, books, etc.).

Using Information

- Inform students how to avoid plagiarism and incorporate sources (e.g. ethical scholarship, note-taking skills, how to paraphrase, quote, summarize)
- Provide citation guidance — [MCC Library Citations guide](#)

SUPPORT

- Include links and contact information for support services - [Tech Support](#), [Tutoring](#), [Writing Center](#).
- List your office hours and options for students to contact you for help (email, virtual meetings, phone).
- Place course and/or assignment specific material on [reserve](#) in the library.
- Identify options for students to [Get Help](#) with a MCC Librarian including 24/7 Chat, research consultations, and email.