

## **Alternative Research Assignments**

Research papers are a common reason for students to use the library and research tools. However, alternative assignments will also encourage students to utilize knowledge-based resources, think critically, and acquire research knowledge. Please feel free to discuss any assignments with your librarian before adapting it to your discipline or course, or incorporating the Campus Common Theme, diversity topics, service learning, etc.

You may find the following list helpful for brainstorming:

1. Examine the treatment of a controversial issue in several different sources. For example, a newspaper article or editorial, peer-reviewed journal article, book, or professional association website.
2. Provide students with a popular news article that presents the findings from a recent peer-reviewed research article (or provide the news article and have students locate the peer-reviewed article in a library database). Discuss the differences between the two articles, including audience, format, content, authority, etc.
3. 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? How important is informal communication in the field? How do professionals keep abreast of new information in this field?
4. Create an annotated bibliography (descriptive or evaluative) of a specified number of sources.
5. Working in small groups or pairs, prepare a print or web-based guide or brochure to introduce others to the various information sources in a discipline or on a specific topic.
6. Compare Internet search engine and periodical database searches using identical search statements. Discuss the initial search results and compare the findings. Revise the search statements and appropriately search each source again. Compare the final results.
7. Using book reviews, biographical information, and citation indexes, explore how and why a work becomes a "classic." What effect can a classical work have on a discipline?
8. Explore a scholar, historical figure, or other significant person's career and ideas by locating biographical information, preparing a bibliography of their works, and analyzing the reactions of peers to their works.
9. Compare primary and secondary sources on the same topic. When and how are either used in a given discipline?
10. Working in small groups or pairs, 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. Report findings to the class.

11. Review a book, play, or film using specified criteria. Discuss the author's credentials. Compare the book or film to similar works in the field. Compare the film to its source book or play.
12. Write "program notes" for a concert, art or museum exhibit. Research the artist and/or an object or composition using library and Internet resources.
13. Critique an article. Locate two authoritative websites supporting your response to the topic. Cite the URLs in an appropriate format and highlight the points indicating this support.
14. Find and evaluate a website against specified criteria. Cite the website in a specific citation format and write a brief evaluation (2-3 paragraphs). Note reasons why these pages are, or are not, appropriate for university level student research or for in-class use. Attach a printout of the first page of the website.
15. Students follow a piece of federal or state legislation related to their field of study. Provide supporting research as to why this issue is important or controversial and cite sources. Present findings to the class in a poster session.
16. Select a Wikipedia article on a specified topic and critique it. Compare the information presented in the Wikipedia article to more traditional sources of information on this topic, such as a print encyclopedia or textbook.
17. Have the class collaborate on its own Wikipedia article, Oncourse wiki, weblog, or podcast and research information to develop the content.
18. Compare literature on a topic from different time periods. How has the treatment of the topic evolved over time?
19. Compare how two different disciplines discuss the same topic using journal articles or online resources from each discipline.
20. Choose a local issue or problem and research how other communities have dealt with it. Write a "letter to the editor" or create a visual presentation, supporting your position with facts and cited sources.

**Adapted from:**

SDSU Library & Information Access <http://infodome.sdsu.edu/about/depts/instruction/altresch.shtml>

Stephens-Burnett Memorial Library [http://library.cn.edu/library\\_assignments.html](http://library.cn.edu/library_assignments.html)

Ohio University Libraries <http://www.library.ohiou.edu/inst/creativesample.html>

University of Cincinnati Libraries <http://www.libraries.uc.edu/instruction/faculty/assignideas.html>