



Using Research to Improve Critical Thinking Skills

Don't Just Make Them Look Up Stuff!
Make them think!

In other words ...

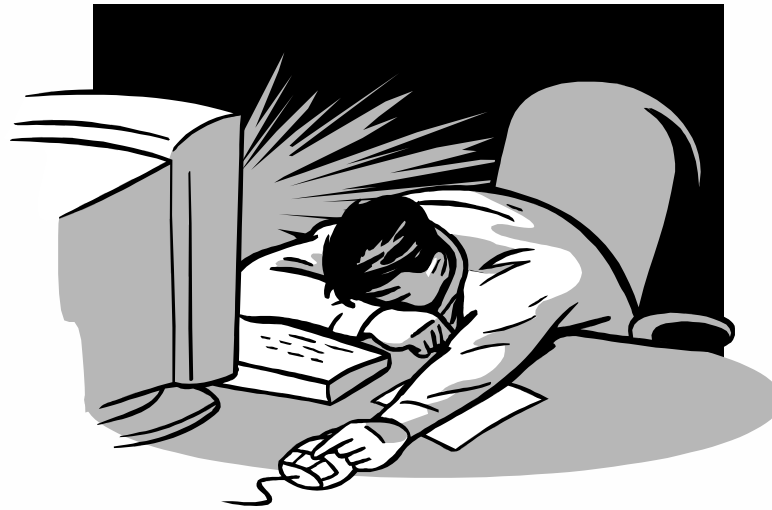
The fault lies, not in our
students, dear Brutus,
but in our research
assignments!

Here's you!



Here's what your students hear!

- Blah, blah, blah, blah, sources, blah, blah, blah, blah, due date. . .



Painful truths that faculty must face!

- Many students do not come to college with strong research skills.
- They do not know how to paraphrase.
- As a result, they are likely to plagiarize—either intentionally or unintentionally.
- Programs like Turnitin can help you find plagiarism, but can't help root out the source problem of unintentional plagiarism.

Remember: Many of our students are “confused fact finders.”

- They proceed as if the goal is to find the single, “correct” answer.
 - Don’t realistically perceive uncertainty and complexity.
 - Insist that professors or texts provide the “correct” answer.
 - Appear unable to read carefully.
 - Can’t evaluate or apply evidence.
 - Express confusion or futility.

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And the saddest truth of all. . .

If you want students to research well,
you're going to have to take time to
teach them some basic skills.

The Good News!

- The Librarians can help you do this!



The planned research assignment is the best research assignment.

- Remember, Comp I is not a prerequisite for most classes on campus.
 - What do I want the students to learn from this assignment?
 - Do we have the resources available?
 - What sources are acceptable?
 - How will it be graded?

Coming up with a Topic

- Save yourself future pain. Ban bad topics now!
 - What is a bad topic? Anything that leads to a bad paper.
 - The overdone topic (Euthanasia)
 - The overly-emotional topic (Abortion)
 - The report (The Civil War)
 - The trivial topic (Dogs vs. cats as pets)
 - One-source topic (Meaning of a poem)

The Good Topic!

- Requires students to move up Bloom's Hierarchy.
 - Analyze
 - Evaluate
 - Synthesize
- Requires students to come to a decision, solve a problem, make a plan, or come to a judgment.

A good research question leads to a good research project!

- Subject: Education
- Topic: Teaching
- Essential Question: What are the most effective techniques for teaching preschool students?
 - Foundation Question -- What techniques are used to teach preschool children?
 - Foundation Questions—What does the child development research say about teaching preschool children?

Example Two

- Subject : History
- Topic: Civil War
- Essential Question: How would U.S. History have been different if Stephen Douglas had been elected President in 1860?
 - Foundation Question: What platform did Stephen Douglas run on?
 - Foundation Question: What state was he from? Did it support slavery?

Example Three

- Subject: Social Work
- Topic: Family Violence
- Essential Question: What plan can I develop to help a client escape from family violence?
 - Foundation Question: What resources (local and national) are available for victims of family violence?
 - Foundation Question: What are the characteristics of violent families?

Have students work with their research question throughout the semester.

- Journal
- Annotated bibliography
- Proposal
- Written update
- Presentation
- Research defense

Be very clear about what are acceptable sources!

- Know what library sources are available.
- In a database, a journal article and a magazine article look the same (especially in HTML).
- Avoid encyclopedias for sources in the final paper.
- Students will use a Google search if you don't require other types of sources.

Be very clear about how you're going to grade (and follow through)!

- Use a rubric.
- Reward students for taking chances with their thought processes.
- Don't tell students you're going to grade for critical thinking if you're really going to grade for grammar, format, and organization only.
- Don't expect perfection.

How librarians can help!

- We can do an orientation just for this assignment.
- We can work with you to make sure we have adequate sources for the assignment.
- We can make a reference guide for your class.

A great resource!

- <http://library.chattanoogaastate.edu/instruction/essquest.htm>