In-Class Research Activities

The following activities can be used during class or as homework assignments. Each activity corresponds with the following information literacy student learning objectives.

Student Learning Objectives

1. Define and articulate the need for information.
2. Identify the value and differences of potential information types relevant to the project.
3. Access the needed information effectively and efficiently.
4. Evaluate relevant information and its sources.
5. Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
6. Abide by the laws, regulations, and institutional policies related to the ethical access and the ethical use of information resources.

Analyze the Argument

1. Students locate, identify and examine the assumptions implicit in an article. Identify the author’s thesis. Outline the theoretical framework used to account for the results.
2. Students examine the experimental design, data, and interpretation of the data in a research paper for adequacy and consistency.

SLOs: 3, 4
Level: Bachelor’s (Step 1), Master’s (Steps 1 & 2)

Compare Internet and Database Searches

Given an appropriately narrow research topic from the instructor, students perform a search on the Internet and also in an academic database. Students will demonstrate their search strategies and search results, then compare the findings and discuss the differences between these search tools with respect to content and search strategy (Burkhardt et al., 2010, p. 82, 84).

SLOs: 2, 4
Level: Bachelor’s, Master’s
Compare Databases
Students should select two databases (SuperSearch, Google Scholar, or a subject-specific option) and explore the coverage, currency, journal titles, search interfaces, and features of the two. Using think/pair/share or a reflective paper, student can discuss how these databases might directly or indirectly influence their research (Burkhardt et al., 2010, p. 77).

SLOs: 2, 3
Level: Bachelor’s, Master’s, Doctoral

Compare Popular and Scholarly Literature
Find the original article for a research study mentioned in the popular press. Compare the announcement to the study. Analyze the accuracy of, and/or the discrepancies present in, the announcement’s summary of the research findings. Alternatively, find a research article and write a summary announcement suitable for the popular press (Burkhardt et al., 2010, p. 65).

SLOs: 1, 2, 3
Level: Bachelor’s, Master’s

Examine Coverage of a Controversial Issue
Examine the treatment of a controversial issue in several information sources (newspapers, scholarly journals, trade journals, blogs, Twitter). Discuss the influences behind and implications of the process of information creation and dissemination.

SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4
Level: Bachelor’s

Examine a Classical Work
Assemble and assess the criteria used to deem a work a “classic” in a discipline. Analyze the effect a classical work has on a discipline.

SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Level: Master’s, Doctoral

Follow a Piece of Legislation through Congress
Assess the process of government. Evaluate the influences behind, and implications of the creation, dissemination, and worldly influence of a piece of legislation.

SLOs: 1, 3, 5, 6
Level: Master’s, Doctoral

Identify Primary Research
Identify research articles that document an original study. Differentiate between primary and secondary sources in a discipline. Discuss when and why it is appropriate to use each in academic research (Burkhardt et al., 2010, p. 14).

SLOs: 2, 4
Level: Bachelor’s, Master’s
Locate and Evaluate the “Best” and “Worst” Website on a Topic

Using a research topic provided by the instructor, students will develop criteria for judging the credibility, relevancy, accuracy, and purpose of the information they find. Have students locate websites relevant to the topic, highlight features of the “best” site, and recommend improvements for the “worst” site (Burkhardt et al., 2010, p. 88, 90).

SLOs: 2, 3, 4
Level: Bachelor’s

Locate Primary Sources from the Date of Your Birth

Students use a minimum of three different sources and three different resource types (e.g., a newspaper article, a top-40 hit, a painting). Write a short annotation of each source, and include the complete bibliographic citation.

SLOs: 2, 3, 6
Level: Bachelor’s

Locate Two Scholarly Articles; Compare and Evaluate Their Bibliographies

Using a predetermined research topic, access relevant information, compare similar and unique references, and consider the quality of sources and the authority of each article.

SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4
Level: Bachelor’s, Master’s

Locate and Evaluate an Alternative Press Article

On a topic previously determined, or assigned by instructor, students locate and evaluate resources considered to be alternative press. Assess implications of the information/publishing cycle on alternative information creation, dissemination, and intellectual freedom.

[Source: http://library.minneapolis.edu/courses/infs1000/assignments/Team_Assignment_6.pdf]

SLOs: 2, 3, 4, 6
Level: Bachelor’s, Master’s

Research Careers

Students research a career of their choice, finding information in at least one reference book, one general-audience book, one journal article, and one website (use a set number of each source type). Identify required career qualifications such as education, experience, and licenses (if any). Research salary expectations, employment opportunities, and employment forecasts. Reflect upon your interests, abilities and experience.

[Source: http://library.missouristate.edu/services/fyp/assignments.htm]

SLOs: 1, 2, 5
Level: Bachelor’s
Review Internet Search Engines

Using a research topic provided by the instructor, students will practice their search strategies, employing the strategies in two different Internet search engines (e.g., Google, Bing, Yahoo). Students compare the results from the two searches: Which returned “better” results? Why? (Burkhardt et al., 2010, p. 84). For Master’s students, include examining search-engine mechanics (includes SLOs 2, 6).

SLOs: 3, 4
Level: Bachelor’s, Master’s

Track Scholarly Roots

Students trace the “genealogy” of a current faculty member’s scholarly roots from his or her mentors and advisors back to the historical “big names” in the field (see Goodwin, C. J., Dingus, M., & Petterson, S. (2002). The genealogy project: Tracing academic roots in the history and systems course. Teaching of Psychology, 29(1), 61-63.)

SLOs: 1, 3, 5
Level: Master’s, Doctoral

Update an Existing Bibliography or Review of the Literature

Students select a topic about which a literature review or bibliography was written a number of years ago. Update the literature review or bibliography. Discuss the evolution of the particular topic and the scholarly communication surrounding it. Analyze, synthesize and integrate the ideas identified in the search.

SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Level: Master’s, Doctoral

Use Wikipedia

Review a Wikipedia article on a topic from the class. Evaluate its accuracy and the sources listed in the further reading. Revise an entry’s information, including citations to sources (Burkhardt et al., 2010, p. 26).


SLOs 1, 2, 4
Level: Bachelor’s

For more in-class activities and assignments, check out:


Check availability.