Can your students identify, access, and evaluate the information they need to complete their papers and projects? Here are some hints for developing successful research assignments.

- **Goals:** Think about what you want your students to gain from the assignment and explain it to them. Just as you cannot teach a semester course in one day, students cannot become competent researchers from a single assignment. Students develop research strategies by using particular library resources (such as a topical database), or by preparing an annotated bibliography. We emphasize a scaffolded approach to developing research strategies and information research knowledge. First year seminar library labs help students develop beginning research competencies, but these competencies are further developed and reinforced through scaffolding in general education courses, upper division courses and finally senior seminars.

- **Expectations:** Don't assume students know how to use the library, even if they tell you they do. The majority of students have never been presented with the number of information choices they find in a university library. They also do not enter college understanding the organization of information within a discipline, the expectation of research at a university level, or how to evaluate information. Be specific in what you want the students to do and how you direct them to do it. As an example, if you want them to use scholarly articles, be sure they know what distinguishes a scholarly journal from a popular journal. If you determine students are having difficulties with finding relevant, authoritative information, consider contacting your liaison librarian to instruct students in research strategies.

- **Reality:** Don't ask your students to do something that can't be done with the time and resources available. Ask your liaison librarian if there are enough resources available in the library to sufficiently cover the assignment requirements.

- **Topic:** Choosing a topic is often difficult for students. Even if you suggest general topics, they may need help focusing their topics to meet the requirements for assignments. Asking for a paragraph that describes their research interest will help you head off disasters. Consider assigning students a simple annotated bibliography or recommend specific information resources for them to use.

- **Critical Thinking:** Create an assignment that requires the student to think about the information they are retrieving, such as comparing two sources or finding two viewpoints on a topic. Often students will take the first things they find on a topic, if not given a reason to be more discriminating.

- **Pace the Assignment:** For large research assignments, break the assignment into smaller chunks so you can ascertain whether or not the student understands the research process and can find appropriate sources. Reviewing a draft bibliography can help you direct student research and also gives students enough time to use library services, such as librarian consultations, or Interlibrary Loan if needed. Additionally, pacing the assignment discourages procrastination.

- **Internet:** Explain to students the difference between the open web information found through search engines and structured scholarly information databases (such as ERIC or JSTOR) available electronically via the library. Students are often told by professors NOT to use the open web for a class assignment. Students often confuse the open web and electronic scholarly resources the library purchases. The majority of our subscription databases and many of our periodicals are only accessible via web access through UR's network.

- **Liaison Librarians’ Role:** Liaison librarians are available to help at any stage of the research process from planning research assignments, instructing students in research strategies and resources and acquiring research materials. Encourage your students to contact a liaison librarian.

Library Website: [library.richmond.edu](http://library.richmond.edu)
Liaison Librarians: [library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html](http://library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html)
Phone: (804) 289-8669 / IM: boatwrightinfo / Email: [library.richmond.edu/help/email-question.html](http://library.richmond.edu/help/email-question.html)
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<th>If you currently require students to:</th>
<th>Consider having them:</th>
<th>Reinforce research competencies by:</th>
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| Attend Lectures                      | • Locate and evaluate a scholarly article on the lecture topic.  
• Find biographical information on the speaker | • Use a research database covering a wide variety of topics and resources such as *Academic Research Complete* or a specialized database, such as *Biography Reference Bank*. |
| Participate in class discussions     | • Locate and cite an outside source as evidence for a response.  
• Locate further information on a topic that occurred during class discussion.  
• Bring materials (books, articles, websites) to share in class discussions. | • Use the library catalog to find books, movies and government information.  
• Use sources suggested on the library subject/major research guide appropriate to the topic or course. |
| Write papers                         | • Locate and evaluate information sources – have students write “all but the paper” research proposals & annotated bibliographies.  
• Submit a working thesis and bibliography early in the research process.  
• Include a variety of sources as evidence of research, including primary source material.  
• Write an annotated bibliography.  
• Compare popular and scholarly or primary and secondary coverage on the same topic. | • Use the library’s guidelines for evaluating web resources and information.  
• Use the library’s Citing Sources information on citations, citation styles and annotated bibliographies.  
• Use the library subject/major research guide appropriate to the topic or course. |
| Give a speech or presentation       | • Provide references or write a blog post about their research process. | • Understand the research process better by being able to describe what resources were used and why they were selected. |
| Create a multi-media product         | • If available through a library resource, ask students to locate the article or reading, rather than provide them a copy in class.  
• Research and report on a footnote in a textbook or article.  
• Use a non-current article to update the topic with current information sources.  
• Use a citation database to trace an article, a classic paper or a scholar’s career. | • Use the library databases to locate and access journal articles.  
• Use specialized features of a database, such as *ISI Web of Science*. |
| (podcast, video, etc.)               |                       |                                   |
| Participate in Blogs, Discussion     |                       |                                   |
| Boards (Blackboard), or other Web    |                       |                                   |
| 2.0 media                           |                       |                                   |
| Read a textbook or other course      |                       |                                   |
| reading                               |                       |                                   |