Tips for faculty for assignments involving the library/research

Make it Relevant
Students need to learn to use the library, but it won’t be important to them unless you create a situation where they must do so. Assignments involving research will be meaningful if they are built into the (graded) content of your course.

Assume Minimal Knowledge of Library/Research Resources (despite what students tell you)
Students may equate information technology skills with information literacy skills. They may not understand what is meant by "peer-reviewed," "primary source," or "journal article." They may be unaware that the library's resources are in any way different from what can be found on the Internet. (This is something we always emphasize in instruction classes.)

Be Specific
Creating a limit on resources like "no websites" can be confusing to students (who may not differentiate between electronic sources on the library's website and the free Web). Call databases, the library catalog, and other information sources by name: ProQuest, Bentley Library Catalog, Harvard Business Review, American FactFinder, etc.

Schedule Library Instruction for the Right Reasons and at the Right Time
General introductions to the library, unrelated to an assignment or a course, can be superficial, and whatever was covered promptly forgotten. Students should be aware of their assignment and what they will need to research (generally speaking) before coming for a session in the library. Students learn best when they have an incentive to do so and a task at hand that makes the workshop meaningful. A tour or brief introduction to library resources won’t get at research skills that students need.

Build in Reflection and Critical Thinking
Students benefit from opportunities to reflect on their research strategies and think critically about what they are doing. Show your students what you look for when you read journal articles or evaluate or analyze information. Provide opportunities for feedback and reflection throughout the research process. Include a method for evaluating strategies and sources (for example, a research log). Consider grading their bibliographies for quality of sources, balance, etc., not just for correct documentation.

Preventing Plagiarism
Go further than sharing a definition of plagiarism; provide examples of paraphrasing and summarizing and using and documenting sources in an essay. Many students will have no experience incorporating sources in their writing, and use of sources may have been very different in high school.

Encourage Students to Use Reference Services. Librarian's are available to help students several hours a day in person and by phone, e-mail, and chat. Find our hours on our library homepage.

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Credit: Adapted from “Tips for Planning a Library Experience for Your FYE Class,” Tutt Library, Colorado College.