# Designing Effective Research Assignments

A well-designed research assignment is an excellent way to introduce learners to the resources available through the RGO Library & Learning Commons (LLC) and on the web while building the information, digital, and computer literacy skills of learners.

Below are some tips and advice to follow when designing assignments that involve library research:

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<th>Do…</th>
<th>Don’t…</th>
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<td>• Be clear what types of resources are acceptable such as print books, ebooks, government documents, academic journals, trade journals, statistics, newspapers, etc., but also provide opportunities for learners to critically evaluate their sources and justify their choices</td>
<td>• Require a “checklist” of formats or be overly prescriptive with permitted sources – what is most important is that the information is sufficiently current, credible, and reliable for the given context and purpose</td>
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<td>• Contact the library or search the catalogue/databases on the library’s website to ensure adequate resources are available and/or request feedback/guidance for a particular assignment</td>
<td>• Design assignments without considering what is available through the library and/or what would be the most suitable formats to answer a given research topic or question</td>
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<td>• Request important or high-demand items be placed in the Reserve collection</td>
<td>• Assume the library has multiple copies of items learners may need</td>
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<td>• Schedule a lab-based workshop or in-class demonstration to help familiarize learners with the library’s electronic resources</td>
<td>• Assume learners are skilled researchers – they are likely skilled Internet surfers, which is a different and often irrelevant skill</td>
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<td>• Consult with the library to request a formal tour or orientation</td>
<td>• Visit the library unannounced and/or assign an independent “scavenger hunt” (learners quickly discover library assistants can complete the assignment for them)</td>
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<td>• Remind learners they do not need to physically visit the library to access resources and get help – the vast majority of resources are available through the library website and questions can be answered by email or IM webchat</td>
<td>• Accept the excuse that the library was closed and/or individual help from the Librarian or Library Assistants was unavailable</td>
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• **Review how to avoid plagiarism** and instil confidence in the ability of learners to integrate sources through cited paraphrasing and quotations in order to support, rather than replace, their own ideas.

• Place emphasis on punitive aspects of breaking academic honesty policies, such that learners are intimidated and overly cautious (leading to “find and replace” patch-writing instead of effective paraphrasing, summary, and synthesis).

• **Clarify what is meant by the Internet, websites and/or online resources** by explaining that library databases and reliable sources such as government information on the web are acceptable.

• Depict all web-based sources as low worth or off-limit – most journals and books are available exclusively in electronic format and print counterparts may not be available, which can easily confuse and frustrate learners.

• **Provide guidelines and step-by-step instructions** (i.e. refine the topic; consult an encyclopedia/reference database; form a working thesis; test the thesis against scholarly journal articles and books).

• Assume learners already have the necessary experience, knowledge or skills for academic research.

• **Assume learners understand library jargon** – databases, peer review, and periodicals are often foreign concepts.

• **Explain, provide definitions, or use plain language** instead of unfamiliar terms for library resources.

• **More Tips & Advice:**

  ➢ If poor research skills and/or plagiarism are concerns, consider scaffolding the assignment by beginning with a proposal followed by a research log and/or annotated bibliography, an outline, and a rough draft.

  ➢ Help learners find appropriate topics. Give suggestions, require learners to get approval for the topic, or instruct learners how to find a good topic. Many times learners get discouraged if their topic is too broad, too narrow, or too difficult to research.

  ➢ Use the plug-in, **Curriculum Builder**, to search library resources and build reading lists within D2L to help learners get started on a research topic and provide examples of suitable sources for assignments.

  ➢ Emphasize that research is a process and encourage practical ways to get started early:
    - Ask learners to test their off-campus login to ensure it’s working
    - Suggest learners download free apps for library databases to conduct research on mobile devices (visit [http://bowvalleycollege.libguides.com/apps](http://bowvalleycollege.libguides.com/apps) for more information)
    - Require learners to find and share a source from the library’s databases on a D2L discussion board.