

Integrating Information Literacy into the Curriculum

Wesleyan University Library

For students to become lifelong learners, they need to know not just how to learn, but how to teach themselves. Knowing how to efficiently locate, accurately evaluate, effectively use, and clearly communicate information in its various formats is an important set of skills for a self-directed learner. Like any set of skills, it must be learned and practiced. Traditionally, these skills are not directly taught, but are learned implicitly and perhaps haphazardly in the context of a research paper or project. But there are many other options for assignments, either in conjunction with or separate from a traditional research project, for explicitly and systematically teaching and providing practice using these skills.

Wesleyan's librarians offer the following list of projects and assignments as a set of possibilities for integrating [information literacy](#) skills into the curriculum. Any of these ideas can be modified or combined in various ways appropriate to their context. If you are interested in exploring ways to integrate information literacy instruction into your teaching, please contact your department's library liaison (see the list at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/libr/facliais.htm>) or Kendall Hobbs, Instruction Librarian (khobbs@wesleyan.edu, x3962).

General introduction to or overview of the literature of a discipline:

- Compare and evaluate reference sources. Look up a topic in a few different subject encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc, and compare how the topic is covered. Students learn how reference sources are created, how and when to use them, criteria for evaluating them, and their limitations.
- Write an encyclopedia article on a topic. Define the topic and its scope, what are current issues and questions, who are current prominent scholars/researchers, how is work disseminated and accessed, brief bibliography of important recent literature.
- Identify and compare major subject journals. Introduce students to the role of journals in the field, see how journals can differ in approach and perspective.
- Review a major subject journal. Trace how a journal changes over time: who is published in it, what topics are covered and how they are covered.
- Review a subject index, yearbook, or other periodic reference source. Note how trends in topics studied and the ways they are studied evolve over time.

Tools and techniques for effectively searching the literature of a discipline:

- Keep a research log. Involves recording sources consulted and why, keywords and subjects searched, results of searches, how searches were modified based on results, results of modified searches, etc. This gets students to think about the choices they make as researchers.
- Search in a specific index or database (compile bibliography, keep a research log). Useful for more sophisticated databases: use thesaurus to find appropriate subject headings for a topic, 'search history' function to modify or combine results of previous searches, Boolean strategies for complex searches, other advanced features and how they help.
- Search the Internet (annotated bibliography of sources, research log). Using the Internet for scholarly research, how to find and evaluate sites, how to determine the reliability of Internet sources, what you can and cannot find on the Internet.
- Compare results from different sources. Search in and then compare results from two academic indexes (e.g. how do different disciplines approach the same topic), different search engines or subject directories on the Internet, or free sources on the Web vs. subscription sources via the library. Shows the importance of selecting appropriate research tools.

Citation searching – using citation indexes, bibliographies, etc to explore how the literature of a field indexes itself:

- Track an author, or a particular article or book, through a citation index. How to use citation indexes, what does it mean to be cited, see the interconnectedness of the scholarly network, see how topics evolve and mutate.
- Trace a scholar's career. Use biographical and bibliographical tools, see how that individual fits in the scholarly network, and how the scholar's work has been evaluated by others.
- Create a bibliography of a scholar's publications. Requires a thorough search of all appropriate bibliographical tools to do a complete bibliography.

Analyzing and evaluating the literature of a discipline:

- Write an annotated bibliography of a topic. Involves selecting and using appropriate indexes, briefly summarizing and accurately evaluating sources, properly citing sources.
- Write a literature review (or, update an older literature review). Involves using indexes, learning about literature reviews, see how a topic evolves and how to trace its evolution.
- Create an anthology of readings for a topic/class. Select articles, essays, book chapters, web sites, etc, useful for students learning the topic. Write an introduction summarizing the subject; describe each item included in the anthology, explaining why it is included. Add a supposition that you may not get copyright permission to include some of your selections: select some alternative readings, explain why they are alternates but not on the primary list.
- Compare several reviews of a book. Find academic book reviews, see critical responses to scholarly work.
- Write a book review. Read academic book reviews, learn their purpose, know how to analyze a book, write a publishable review of a book.
- Compare an academic/scholarly article with a nonacademic article on the same topic. How to distinguish between different types of publications, peer-review and academic publishing process, compare typical characteristics of the different types of publications.
- Read a paper's references. Find articles cited in a paper's bibliography, critique how and why the author used them.
- Find primary sources, compare with secondary sources on the topic. Understand the difference between primary and secondary sources, learn what constitutes a 'primary' source for a specific discipline or project, search tools and strategies for finding primary sources.
- Find newspaper and magazine articles reporting on scholarly research, and the research being reported. Critique how the scholarly findings are reported in the popular press.

Presentations of results of research:

- Public presentations of research results. Rather than (or, in addition to) a paper, have students present the results of their research in a Web site, PowerPoint presentation, poster session, etc. Alternate ways of organizing and presenting results, compare advantages and limitations of different types of presentation (e.g. poster sessions or slide presentations force succinctness, Web pages allow for multimedia and nonlinearity, etc).
- Write a research proposal. Do a literature search and review, evaluate the current state of knowledge in the topic, write a specific proposal for an extensive research project to extend the current state of knowledge.
- Write a grant proposal to a specific funding agency. Find appropriate agency for project; include purpose, objectives, procedures, etc., along with a literature review, budget, etc. Divide class into groups, each group reviews a set of proposals by others in the class.
- Write an exam for the class. Explain why you posed each question, and write (or at least outline) what you think would be a good answer.
- Write a newspaper article reporting the results of scholarly research for a general audience.