Powerful Information Literacy Assignments

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What is Information Literacy?

- Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

- An information literate individual is able to:
  - Determine the extent of information needed
  - Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
  - Evaluate information and its sources critically
  - Incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base
  - Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
  - Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally

Library assignments come in many forms…

The good…

The bad…

The ugly…

“Find the meanings of the following fifty terms, define them, and explain their importance to this course. You’ll find the answers in the Library.”
Purpose: to write an effective research-based argumentative essay on a topic that’s appropriate for an academic paper.

Audience: an academic audience that is either skeptical or holds opposing viewpoints.

Choose one of the following

A position paper in which you make a claim about a controversial issue. You define the issue, take a clear position, make a convincing argument, and acknowledge opposing views.

A proposal argument in which you propose a course of action in response to a recognizable problem. The proposal says what can be done to improve the situation or change it altogether. You define the problem, acknowledge possible solutions, propose your solution or solutions, and explain why your solution is the most feasible.

Length: 1800-2400 words (not including your Works Cited page).

Research: Draw from at least 4-8 scholarly sources

At least one of your sources must have been published in a periodical (scholarly journal, magazine, newspaper, government documents, etc.), preferably a scholarly journal.

Only one of your sources may be a popular source (newspaper/magazine article, website, etc.), and you may use a popular source only in addition to the four required scholarly sources.
What’s wrong with this assignment?

This assignment doesn’t promote natural learning
• No context/justification for the writing
• Not situated in the student’s current or future reality
• No reason for the student to do this assignment beyond completing course requirements/getting a grade

This assignment is a numbers game for both the student and the librarian
• The student must accumulate the proper number and kinds of sources (regardless of their appropriateness for the topic)
• The librarian is caught up in the numbers-sources game to help the student
• Little or no attention is paid to source evaluation or critical thinking
Librarians support course assignments to help students

I’m here to help you with your assignment. Now shush while I show you the databases.

I’ll help you find those difficult sources only available to a superhero.
Characteristics of situated learning

- Provide authentic contexts that reflect the way that knowledge will be used in real life.
- Provide authentic activities.
- Provide access to expert performances and the modeling of processes.
- Provide multiple roles and perspectives.
- Support collaborative construction of knowledge.
- Promote reflection to enable abstractions to be formed.
- Promote articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit.
- Provide coaching and scaffolding by the teacher at critical times.
- Provide for authentic assessment of learning within the tasks.

The IL Standards can help you make your students information literate.

Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (ACRL)
- What kind of information do you need?
- How/where do you find it efficiently?
- Does it fulfill the information need?
- How do you use it most effectively?
- How do you use it ethically, legally, appropriately?

Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning (AASL)
For example…reimagining the Freshman English research paper

Front end = planning to incorporate IL into Assignments

- Choose IL learning outcomes for an activity/assignment
  - ACRL IL Competence Standards for Higher Education
  - Discipline- or department-specific standards or learning outcomes
- Develop a learning scenario that is
  - Problem-based
  - Contains/involves a real-life situation students are likely to encounter professionally or personally
  - Requires the finding, evaluating, and critical use of information for success
- Ponder how you would provide authentic evaluation/assessment of this work
Using IL standards as learning outcomes

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For example…planning using IL standards

IL learning outcomes for this writing assignment (see the IL Student Learning Outcomes Checklist):

1. The information literate-student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.
2. The information literate-student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
3. The information-literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into her/his base and value system.
4. The information-literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
5. The information-literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.
Context: You work in the Human Resources Department of a family-friendly, values-neutral company that employs both gay and straight workers. Currently, the company provides financial assistance for married couples seeking to adopt children. Gay employees have inquired about the possibility of getting company financial support for adoption by gay couples.

While the company is interested in supporting families, the inability of gays to marry in your state is a sticking point, since the CEO is convinced that children thrive in families where the parents are married. There is also the danger of potential damage to the company’s image with its more conservative investors and customers who would object to the support of gay adoption. However, rather than deny gays equal financial assistance for adoption and this possibly lose good employees, the CEO has tasked HR with investigating this problem and making a recommendation as to future action: Do the possible benefits of supporting adoption by committed gay couples outweigh the potential negative effects?

Divide into groups, and brainstorm the pros and cons of the company’s financial support for adoption by gay couples. Next, identify resources that could supply the needed information and brainstorm search terms. Then, using appropriate library resources located in the ENGL 101 LibGuide (http://libguides.usd.edu/ENGL_101), find reliable information that allows your group to make an argument for or against the provision of financial aid to gay couples seeking to adopt children. Provide a report on your findings and make a recommendation to the CEO as to what action to take on this issue. Your report should argue for and defend the position your group recommends and also articulate objections against your recommendation, with counterarguments. Provide a list of the resources you consulted (in MLA style) at the end of your report.

If the class chooses, it may stage a mock meeting with the CEO to present their arguments for or against financial assistance of gay adoption.
For example…assessment by IL standards

As ye teach, so shall ye assess…

IL assessment by rubric (AACU Information Literacy VALUE Rubric)

Situated instruction = natural, collaborative learning
For assistance in creating powerful IL assignments, please contact…

- Carol Leibiger, Information Literacy Coordinator
  - C.Leibiger@usd.edu
  - 677-6089

- A subject specialist library faculty member in your discipline
  - http://www.usd.edu/library/subject-specialists.cfm