

# Designing Effective Research Assignments



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# Icebreaker



## 2 Facts, 1 Lie

- Write 3 “facts” related to research: your research, research classes you have taught or taken, etc., BUT one must be a lie
- In groups, discuss each person’s “facts” and vote on which is the lie.
- You win a point for every person you fool.



# Workshop Goals



- Identify common pitfalls with research assignment design
- Discover how to partner with UNLV Libraries to create robust and integrated research assignments
- Learn how to develop research assignments
- Analyze if an assignment is scaffolded throughout the course
- Discuss alternatives to traditional research papers

# Why “research” assignments?

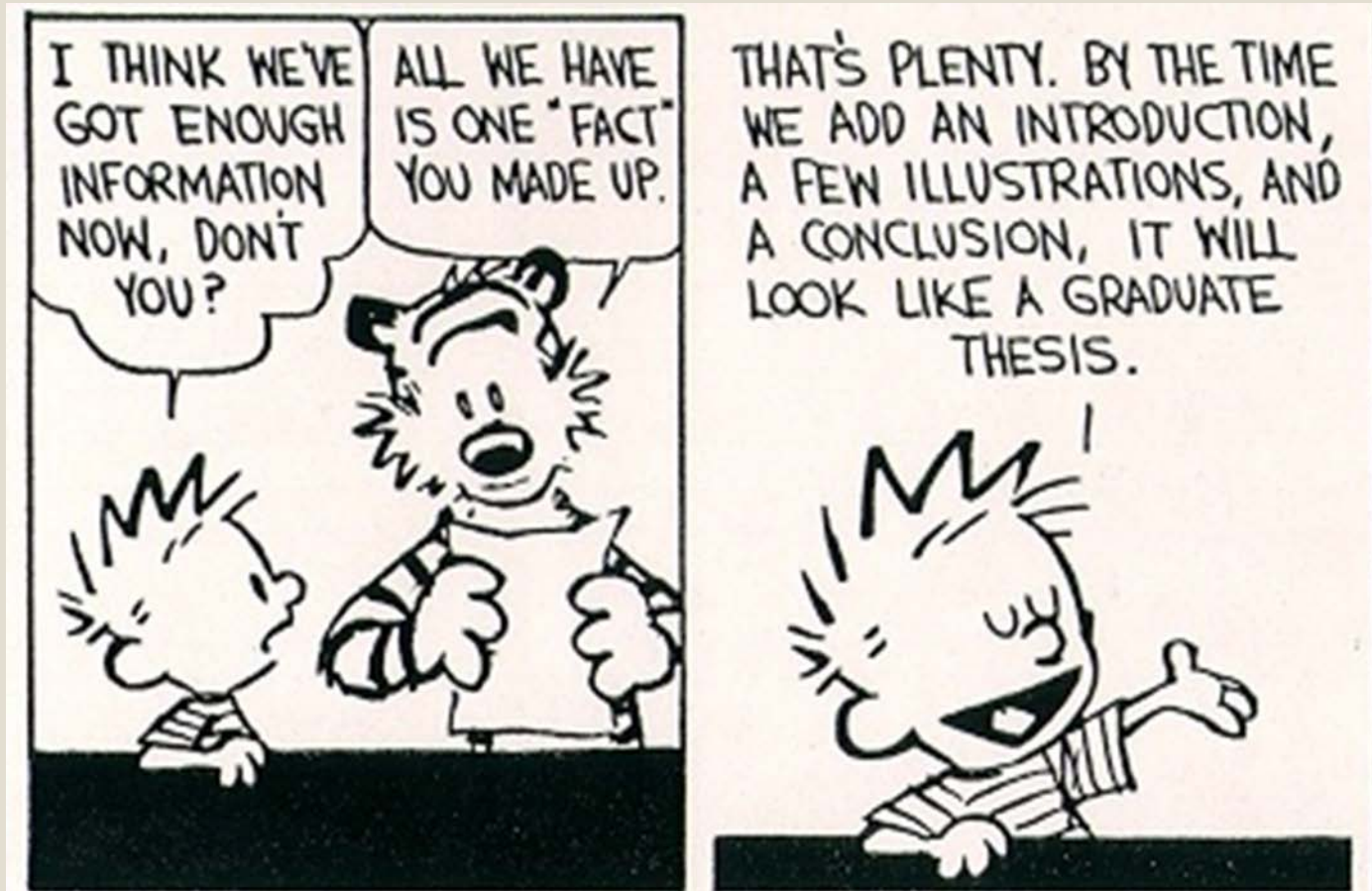


Image source: [http://professorsrsquared.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/calvin\\_hobbes\\_thesis.jpg](http://professorsrsquared.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/calvin_hobbes_thesis.jpg)

# Why does research assignment design matter?



- Project Information Literacy Report
- Content analysis of 191 handouts for course-related research assignments
- Research Question:  
How do assignment sheets provide “instruction, guidance, and support to college students about completing the course-related research process?”

# Findings



- 83% of handouts ask for standard research paper format
- Few assignments discuss information about plagiarism (beyond consequences)
- Very little support is given for research process:
  - ✦ 13% of assignments suggest asking research librarian for help
  - ✦ 14% gave specifics about appropriate resources to use for the assignment
- Most handouts focused on “mechanics of preparing a research assignment” instead of conveying research strategies

# Recommendations for research assignment handouts

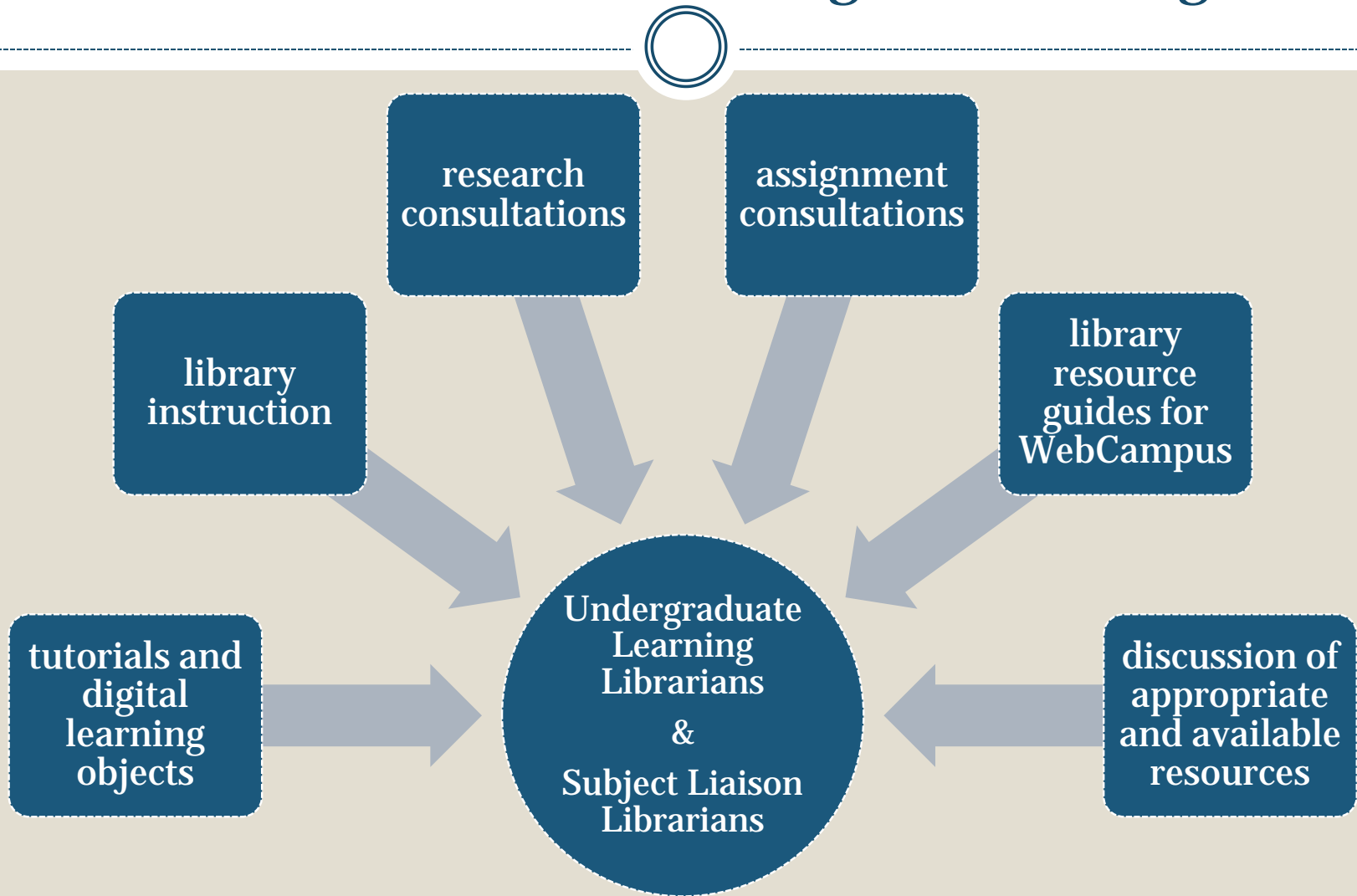


- Clarify “situational context”
- Add “information-gathering context”

Prior research indicates that 75% of students consider their assignment sheets as the most important material an instructor can provide

"Assigning Inquiry: How Handouts for Research Assignments Guide Today's College Students," Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, Project Information Literacy Progress Report, University of Washington's Information School, July 13, 2010

# UNLV Libraries: Partners in Research Assignment Design





# UNLV Research Assignment Template



## Due date:

**Purpose:** *Define the learning objectives, in language and terms that help students recognize how this assignment will benefit their learning.*

**Skills:** The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course / in school / in this field / in professional life beyond school:  
*[Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives](#) ([summarized in this Univ of Victoria chart](#)) can help you explain these skills in language students will*

**Knowledge:** This assignment will also help you to become familiar with the following important content knowledge in this discipline:

**Task:** *Define what activities the student should do/perform. "Question cues" from [Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives](#) ([summarized in this Univ of Victoria chart](#)) might be helpful. List any steps or guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students' efforts.*

## Criteria for Success:

*Define the characteristics of the finished product. Provide specific examples of what these characteristics look like in practice. With students, collaboratively analyze an example of good work before the students begin working. Offer a critiqued example of excellent work with specific indicators of what makes the work successful. Explain how excellent work differs from adequate work. It is often useful to provide a checklist of characteristics of successful work to help the student know if s/he is doing high quality work while s/he is working on the assignment. This enables students to evaluate the quality of their own efforts while they are working, and to judge the success of their completed work. Students can also use your checklist to provide feedback on peers' coursework. Indicate whether this task/product will be graded and/or how it factors into the student's overall grade for the course. Later, asking students to reflect and comment on their completed, graded work empowers them to focus on changes to their learning strategies that might improve their future work.*

# A scaffolded assignment



**Sept  
1**

- Present Assignment
- In-class interviewing activity

**Sept  
8**

- Library liaison presentation

**Sept  
15**

- In-class APA activity

**Sept  
30**

- Interview questions due

**Oct  
15**

- Transcripts due
- In-class compare & contrast activity

**Nov  
17**

- Report due

# Practice: Scaffolding Research Assignments



- Review the “Practice Activity” assignment in your folder
- In pairs/small groups, brainstorm ways that you might scaffold this larger assignment so as to support students throughout the research process
- Things to consider:
  - How can this assignment be broken down into smaller parts?
  - What comprehension checks can you provide students? Will they be worth a grade/points?
  - What do students need to know in order to succeed on this assignment?
  - What content would you provide in order to help them learn these things?

# Alternatives to the Research Paper



- **Plan for assignment's final format at the beginning**
  - Address skills, software or materials that would be used
- **Let's brainstorm options!**