Information literacy and critical research:

> Information literacy related to specific disciplines involves defining an information need in the context of the discipline, finding and evaluating the kinds of data, materials, and information required to research a subject in that field, and using and synthesizing the information to accomplish assigned and creative tasks, add to knowledge, and participate in the discourse of that discipline.
>
> (*Information Literacy Standards for Anthropology and Sociology Students*, ALA /ACRL /ANSS Instruction and Information Literacy Committee Task Force on IL Standards, Jan 15, 2008)

> When we [...] teach information literacy skills to our students, we are empowering them to [...] see themselves as critical agents rather than passive consumers of information.
>
> (Jennifer Gilley, *Women's Studies Information-Seeking*, NWSA Journal, vol.19, no.2, 2007)

Research Assignments:

Research assignments are integral to the learning experience and can be designed to encourage students to actively seek information, retrieve it successfully, assess it critically, and apply it in thought-provoking and challenging ways.

Considering assumptions about student research skills:

Librarians' experience and research shows that students do not have a working knowledge of information research, and they have little or no experience in conducting academic-level research.

Students often:

- Have had no specific lessons or training in research skills,
- Have no notion of experts in a field or of the dimensions of issues,
- Are unaware of the kinds of assistance offered by reference and subject librarians,
- Gather information using only techniques that are already familiar to them.

Providing guidance:

Learning anxiety is common among undergraduate students and extends to information research. Providing appropriate guidance can go a long way in reducing anxiety and in helping students succeed.

Depending on the context, it might be help to:

- Define ambiguous terminology such as "quality research", "academic sources" and even "scholarly journal articles"
- Let students know that there are library search tools and resources that can:
  - simplify the task of finding scholarly sources
  - provide a useful overview of, or introduction to, unfamiliar topics
- Not be too restrictive and allow students to use a variety of sources as long as they show an understanding of their differences
- Provide starting points (i.e. readings, authors, references from readings) to increase confidence and comfort level,
- Provide opportunities for students to report on progress and to ask questions.

Organizing a workshop with your subject librarian is always an option. You can provide links to your library's web site (or better yet to appropriate pages within it) and encourage students to talk with a librarian for any research help they may require.

Your subject librarian

Each academic department in a university has a designated subject librarian who acts as the liaison between the library and the department.

Your subject librarian can:

- Provide feedback and input into assignment design,
- Ensure that sufficient material is available to support assignment requirements,
- Prepare course-specific workshops or guides to meet the needs of your class,
- Assist students and faculty in their research.

This handout – as well as many related articles and other resources – are available at:

http://tiny.cc/bke2f

OR
http://library.concordia.ca/research/subjects/womenst/CriticalResearch.php

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