Four Top Instructor Tips

1. Expect some students will lack the research skills necessary for your course assignment.

2. Know where to send students for help.

3. Talk to your liaison librarian about how she or he could help you support students through workshops or online course content.

4. Use the support resources below to address student issues.

Some challenges:

- Getting comfortable with the library, and getting help
- Choosing and refining a topic
- Understanding scholarly publishing
- Choosing research tools
- Accessing resources
- How to search
- Evaluating sources: journal articles
- Evaluating sources: web resources
- Documenting sources and plagiarism

Leading to the common complaint:

"I can't find anything on my topic!"

See article on library assignments:

http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/163777

## GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH THE LIBRARY AND GETTING HELP

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<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students may:</strong></td>
<td>Provide reassurance.</td>
<td>See your library’s home page for links to help info.</td>
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<td>- feel intimidated by the library system</td>
<td>Expose students gradually to library research, not all at once late in the course.</td>
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<td>- not know that library staff can help them</td>
<td>Recommend a college library if it might be more comfortable for new students.</td>
<td><strong>List of libraries:</strong> <a href="http://content.library.utoronto.ca/general-information/libraries/">http://content.library.utoronto.ca/general-information/libraries/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>- differ greatly in their previous library experience. Don’t assume that your students know the basics!</td>
<td>Encourage them to ask for help, and tell them how.</td>
<td><strong>Research help:</strong> <a href="http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/resources-research/research-help">http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/resources-research/research-help</a></td>
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<td>- leave going to the library to the last minute.</td>
<td>They can get help:</td>
<td><strong>Free classes:</strong> <a href="http://main.library.utoronto.ca/workshops/">http://main.library.utoronto.ca/workshops/</a></td>
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<td>- in person at the reference desk; by phone; chat; e-mail; consultations, or research classes</td>
<td><strong>Assignment calculator:</strong> <a href="http://webapps-new.utsc.utoronto.ca/assignmentcalculator/index.php">http://webapps-new.utsc.utoronto.ca/assignmentcalculator/index.php</a></td>
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**You can advertise library help:**
- in class
- add links to library help sites and contact information on course web pages
- on a class handout
## CHOOSING AND REFINING A TOPIC

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| Are they having trouble understanding or developing their topic? | Defining/selecting a topic:  
- ask themselves what they are interested in within the scope of the assignment;  
- make the topic into a question;  
- come up with main concepts;  
- define terms (dictionaries can help);  
and  
- gather background information from general and subject encyclopedias, textbooks, course readings, or the bibliographies found in these sources.  
Let students know that their topics may change as they learn and read more throughout the research process.  
Provide reassurance. | “Understanding Essay Topics: A Checklist.” From the U of T Writing Centre  
http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/general/essay-topics.  
From Duke University, Choosing a topic  
http://library.duke.edu/services/instruction/libraryguide/choosing.html  
and Refining a topic  
http://library.duke.edu/services/instruction/libraryguide/refining.html  
To access online dictionaries and encyclopedias:  
1. On the U of T Libraries home page, click on Subjects A to Z.  
2. Select your topic from the drop-down menu.  
3. Select the Encyclopedias, Dictionaries tab. |
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| Are students able to judge what type of publication they need for their research? | Teach students to ask themselves:  
What kind of information do I need? (Current versus historical? Original research versus a general survey? Primary versus secondary? Scholarly versus popular?)  
What kind of publication would have that information? (Journals versus books? Newspapers versus magazines? Encyclopedias versus bibliographies?)  
‘Flow of information’ or ‘scholarly publishing’ charts or diagrams may help them understand these concepts. | Flow of information resources: http://collaborations.denison.edu/ohio5/info-lit/a1flow/  
Scientific information is diagrammed in this resource: http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca/usered/grad/researchskills/flow_of_info.html  
Writing about History: What is a primary source http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/history |
# CHOOSING RESEARCH TOOLS

## Issues

Once students know what kind of source they require, they will need to understand what library tool will help them find those sources. For example, they would need the library catalogue to find books, and a journal index or article database to identify journal articles.

## Solutions

Review which research tools help you access which sources, e.g. the catalogue for books, article databases for articles, encyclopedias for quick overviews, etc.

Refer students to a librarian for assistance when appropriate. Make use of online tutorials, research guides, brochures. Have students attend a workshop.

**Library catalogue:** [www.library.utoronto.ca/](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/)

To access online dictionaries and encyclopedias:

1. On the U of T Libraries home page, click on Subjects A to Z.
2. Select your topic from the drop-down menu.
3. Select the Encyclopedias, Dictionaries tab.

To access appropriate article databases:

1. On the U of T Libraries home page, click on Subjects A to Z.
2. Select your topic from the drop-down menu.
3. Try the first on the list: they’re ranked by size, scholarly content, reputation.
4. Read database descriptions.
5. Databases in related subject areas may also be helpful.

## Resources

### Library Workshops:

See the schedule at [http://main.library.utoronto.ca/workshops/](http://main.library.utoronto.ca/workshops/)

### Request Classes:

The library will work with you to create a workshop for your assignment or course. Contact your liaison librarian: [http://main.library.utoronto.ca/liaison/index.cfm?sel=all](http://main.library.utoronto.ca/liaison/index.cfm?sel=all)

### In Person:

Students can consult library staff at the reference desk, on the telephone, through e-mail or chat. [http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/resources-research/research-help](http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/resources-research/research-help)

### Ask A Librarian (Chat Reference Service):

[www.library.utoronto.ca](http://www.library.utoronto.ca)

### Help me write my paper! (Gerstein Science Information Centre)

[http://www.library.utoronto.ca/gerstein/paper/index.html](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/gerstein/paper/index.html)

### Research Guides by Topic:

[http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/](http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/)

[http://main.library.utoronto.ca/MyUTL/guides/library_guides.cfm](http://main.library.utoronto.ca/MyUTL/guides/library_guides.cfm)

### Portal: Incorporating Library Resources into Your Course Web Pages

[http://www.library.utoronto.ca/blackboard](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/blackboard)
## ACCESSING RESOURCES

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<td>Do students know how to physically find resources at the library or on the library web site?</td>
<td>- a library tour&lt;br&gt;- Provide links to library tutorials, online tours, and handouts from your course web page. See Appendix I on finding journal articles. <strong>Tips:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Remind students that they can access online materials from home with their UTORID and password.&lt;br&gt;- If students already have the citation for an article they want, they can enter the article title into the Articles tab or use the Article Finder on the library home page.&lt;br&gt;- Inter-library and inter-campus loan. Students can request to have books delivered from other U of T campuses. They can order books (free) or articles ($5) through inter-library loan from other university libraries if they plan ahead and allow enough time.</td>
<td>Tours&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/utl_help/tours">http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/utl_help/tours</a>&lt;br&gt;Computers &amp; accessing e-resources&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/services/computing-connecting">http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/services/computing-connecting</a>&lt;br&gt;Request articles or books from other libraries&lt;br&gt;<a href="http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/services/ill">http://discover.library.utoronto.ca/services/ill</a></td>
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## HOW TO SEARCH

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<tr>
<td><strong>Students need to be able to:</strong></td>
<td>See the Appendix I for details on building keyword search strategies.</td>
<td>Same as in choosing and accessing resources above.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- choose effective keywords (not just the words from their assignment!)&lt;br&gt;- devise an effective search strategy&lt;br&gt;- troubleshoot search results&lt;br&gt;- choose pertinent resources from their search results.</td>
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# EVALUATING SOURCES: JOURNAL ARTICLES

## Issues

Students have trouble distinguishing between scholarly journal articles and popular material.

## Solutions

Review the differences between popular and scholarly articles, other types of periodicals, and books. One of the comparison charts on the right may help.

Many article databases include tabs or a check-box that let you limit your search to scholarly or academic journals.

Ulrich’s Periodical Directory (UTL Website) will tell you whether a journal is peer-reviewed.

## Resources

**Comparison charts:**

- [http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/poplr.html](http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/poplr.html)
- [http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/evalclues.html](http://lib.colostate.edu/howto/evalclues.html)
- [http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/print/3184](http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/print/3184)

To access Ulrich’s Periodical Directory from the UTL web site:

1. Click on the E-journals tab
2. Enter Ulrich’s
### EVALUATING SOURCES: WEB RESOURCES

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| Students may believe that ‘everything’ is on the web, and neglect sources in other formats. | Explain the benefits of doing research through the library web site:  
- many resources  
- a large proportion are scholarly and reliable  
- more sophisticated search engines can help you find more | Understand and evaluate sources  
Evaluating Web Pages,  
UC Berkeley  
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html |
| Students may not know how to distinguish scholarly, reliable sources on the Web. | Explain that not everything on the web is bad, you need to evaluate case by case.  
Review how to evaluate sources.  
The tip sheets and checklists here may help. |                                                                                                 |
# DOCUMENTING SOURCES AND PLAGIARISM

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<tr>
<td>Students may not be aware of the seriousness of plagiarism.</td>
<td>Impress upon them the importance of academic honesty and the serious</td>
<td>Academic Integrity at the University of Toronto (see the “For Teaching Assistants” section) <a href="http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/">http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May not understand when and how to properly document their sources.</td>
<td>Review how to cite sources using a standard format.</td>
<td>Using Sources: how not to plagiarize; how much to quote; how to paraphrase or summarize <a href="http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources">http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy cut-and-pasting from internet sources increases the problem.</td>
<td>Refer them to appropriate print and online sources.</td>
<td>Major Style Manuals Online: how to cite references and compile bibliographies <a href="http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRsubjectresults.cfm?subject=237">http://main.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRsubjectresults.cfm?subject=237</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recommend that students sign up for a free RefWorks account.</td>
<td>See the Copyright tab in the Scholarly Communication LibGuide</td>
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<td><a href="http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/scholarlycommunication">http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/scholarlycommunication</a></td>
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<td><a href="http://guides.scholarsportal.info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ref-works">http://guides.scholarsportal.info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ref-works</a></td>
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<td>RefWorks 2.0 Tutorials</td>
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APPENDIX I: SEARCHING DATABASES LIKE A PRO

Brainstorm search words: Students will often just type in the terms that appear on their assignment sheet. This approach is likely to fail because of poor search results, and suggests a lack of strategic thinking about what information they need to successfully answer their question. The following tips will help.

1. Read an overview of the topic: Students should begin by reading about their topic in their course notes, or in a good online or print encyclopedia, to generate ideas and words they can use to focus their search.

2. Select effective search words: Students are often unsure what words to pick. As a rule of thumb, they should focus on the topic’s main nouns.

3. Students need to follow a few simple rules to make the catalogue/database work efficiently:
   a) Use hard terms NOT soft terms: Hard terms are very specific or proper nouns. They often result in better search results because they have fewer synonyms. Examples: Toronto, Kyoto Accord, Barack Obama. Soft terms are ineffective because they concentrate on things that have too many synonyms, and therefore may not appear in the citations you are searching. Examples: effects, pros, cons, disadvantages, advantages.
   b) Using synonyms can help you find more results on your topic. Examples: aboriginal, native, First Nations.
   c) Try technical or scientific terms when you are researching a topic in science or technology. For example, you’ll often find more results using the word ‘cannabis’ than ‘marijuana’ or ‘myocardial infarction’ than ‘heart attack’ if you’re searching a medical database.
   d) Boolean operators: Use ‘AND’ between different ideas, and ‘OR’ between synonyms or alternatives. Example: education AND (aboriginal OR native OR First Nations)
   e) Truncation: Use truncation to maximize your search results. Tip: Most databases use * for truncation. Example: Canad* will find Canada, Canadian, or Canadians.

4. Create a manageable list of results: Some students give up when they get 10,000 hits; others grow frustrated when they get only 5. Adjusting a search can fix this problem. Too broad? If students get too many results, they should add an additional concept to the search using AND. Too narrow? If students get too few results, try fewer search words, or synonyms, or broader terms (e.g. media instead of television).

5. Scan the hit list: If a search pulls up 100 articles, students don’t need to read every one. Encourage them not to be overwhelmed by the number of hits that they get. Instead, they should read just the first page or so of results. If they’re useful, keep reading; if not, revise the search.

6. Reading techniques: Students tend to read too little (just the title) or think they need to read too much (the entire book), and give up. Talk to your students about how to quickly grasp the main topics of resources. Example: Read the abstracts of articles; the back cover and table of contents of books.