TEN TIPS TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS WRITE BETTER RESEARCH PAPERS

1. **Don’t assume that students know how to write a research paper.** They may not have taken English 101 yet, or took it several years ago at another institution, or are currently in English 101 and have not yet written their research paper.

2. **Scaffold the project with intermediate due dates.** Many weeks before the research paper is due, require a research question. GRADE IT. Hand it back for revision if the question is not appropriate for the assignment. Ask students to submit a thesis statement. GRADE IT. Require an outline. Require an annotated bibliography. Require that students complete the Library’s Source Evaluation Worksheet for each article or book they are using. GRADE THESE. Make them count. If the research paper is worth 25% of the final grade, you could make the research question worth 5%, the annotated bibliography worth 10%, and the actual paper worth 10%.

3. **Put the paper’s due date several weeks before the last day of the semester.** This way, students have time to revise. Provide opportunities to address shortcomings and problems. Don’t accept sub-par work. Give the “R” grade and require tutoring and revision. Students learn from integrating feedback into their work, not from reading red comments on a paper that won’t ever be looked at again.

4. **Know why you are assigning the project.** If it is to build skills, consider assigning a few short research papers (three 3-page papers instead of one 8-10-page paper) or even a writing assignment that does not require research but will lead into the research paper, such as a personal, persuasive, or comparison/contrast essay, a letter or an interview.

5. **Make sure students have a manageable topic.** If you assign and grade the research question and the Annotated Bibliography you will know the topic is manageable before the actual research paper is written.

6. **Consider one topic for the whole class.** Collaborative research is fun for the students and more manageable for the instructor. You will get to know the sources that are out there, which will make grading the annotated bibliography and research paper much easier.

7. **Search for information.** Before you ask students to research a topic, research it yourself. Know what’s available and what the stumbling blocks are likely to be.

8. **Assign the RESEARCH SKILLS MOOC.** This is a new online resource the library has developed for all students. It makes a great refresher for students who took English 101 several semesters before taking your class. GRADE IT. MAKE IT COUNT.

9. **Make sure students know where to go for help.** Better yet, bring them. The college’s Library and Academic Support Center are top-notch. They improve student success, and the earlier students learn this, the better.

10. **Make research fun.** You went into your discipline because you were passionate about the subject. Rediscover that passion by rediscovering the amazing library resources in your area and learn about recent developments in your field while your students are learning.