

Tips for More Effective Student Research (2)

Give credit where credit is due

It's vital to have an explicit policy on citation and plagiarism that is known to students, parents and your school's administration. Take the time to teach students the skills of summarizing and paraphrasing, and encourage note taking - either by copying web text excerpts into a word processing page and then summarizing or by using pencil and paper. If you do encounter suspicious language that just seems too sophisticated for your eight (or eighteen) year olds to have written themselves, you can easily check. Simply go to Google.com and copy into the search window a short verbatim excerpt from a suspicious passage inside quotation marks. Google.com will check and report the source if the phrase came from the Internet.

Use a variety of sources - not just the Internet

A good research rule for students - consult the Internet last, only after checking a minimum number of other sources. It's a good idea to provide books and other relevant materials for students to use for their research. This requires extra work, but the payoff is considerable, and you'll be meeting a standard.

Guide students' research

Some projects are designed, at least in part, to help students learn effective research techniques. When this is the case, students should certainly do their own searching with some guidance from the teacher. But for shorter term projects, it can be very helpful for teachers to find the best sites ahead of time and make them available in a "hotlist", a page of links that can send students directly to Internet sites screened and selected by the teacher. The easiest way to make a "hotlist" is with Microsoft Word (available in both PC and Macintosh formats). After you have found a good site, copy its URL (Internet address) into a Word document and press return. The software will turn the URL into a link. If you have an Internet connection, clicking the link will bring the user directly to the desired web site. You can of course add relevant information or guidance to the list to direct the students once they reach the site.

No time to make a hotlist? Read the next tip.

Don't reinvent the wheel

You're probably not the first teacher to ask for a report on the otter. Some teachers have assembled the best Internet links on a variety of topics, annotated the links with guiding questions and posted them on a wonderful web site called TrackStar (<http://trackstar.hprtec.org>). If you connect to the TrackStar site, you'll probably find your topic. For example, there are 22 tracks (annotated lists of links) about otters.

Ask better research questions (and teach older students to phrase their own)

This is the most important tip of all. Include guiding questions in the assignment given to students. These questions can direct a student to research those areas called for by the curriculum and standards rather than a random list of facts. For example, for any research on mammals, ask students to find information on diet, habitat, life span and survival adaptations. Finally, ask students to find one or more interesting or unusual characteristics of their chosen mammals.

The Internet is a wonderful resource. But students cannot simply be turned loose to explore it aimlessly. The essential link in any Internet research project is you, the teacher.

Video Clip Assessment Form for Public Service Announcement

Clip Name	Description of Video Clip	Rating ★ Not important ★★ Interesting, but not essential ★★★ Essential	Additional Elements (still images, music, transitions, video footage, narration, art work)	Production Notes (specific instructions for adding or deleting elements)
Example: Father speaks	Example: Father speaks about son not wearing seat belt.	Example: ★★★	Example: Add still image of son.	Example: Add at 3.5 seconds for 2 seconds.