

ng Across the Curriculum

Alternatives to the Research Paper

Some Common Concerns

While the "research paper" may be one of the most commonly assigned papers in college courses, students often disappoint their professors when sent off to complete these sorts of assignments on their own.

- Students often see research papers as formulaic or rote.
- Some may not think through the material as carefully as we'd like them to.

• Inexperienced writers often do not understand the nature of expertise/authority in academic fields. Because they lack depth and breadth, they are often unable to situate themselves within the ongoing conversations that we take for granted.

 Even advanced students will struggle to synthesize new materials—it often takes more than a semester to "synthesize" major concepts with prior experience, knowledge, or opinion.

• Students may underestimate how much time and planning a well-researched response will take, so put off doing the smaller tasks that build toward the final.

• Many students struggle to read academic texts because they are unfamiliar with the register and conventions of these forms. (Research on student citation practices suggests that most students cite from the abstract or first page of their sources.)







"confident" and powerful) as well as the racialized n	nmin, i ve moved away from this stun a bit - but	imitive." The
importance of the machine-human divide, and the re	maybe it fits in with the broad strokes of the dissertation as a whole: the stuff about the	with an engineered
one is a site of contention as to human identity and v	"animate object," etc.	irdre's character,
something between human subject and mechanical of	Comment: awk/weird wording	Deirdre a "subject"
or an "object?" I suggest that Deirdre's machined be	Comment: Source Comment: Comment: Source Comment: Source Comment Source Commenter Source Comment	ct and object —
something in between — but her subjectivity is also	can use it to talk through some of the issues with race/class/civilized stuff? the idea of a "universal"	lity and gender, as
well as race, and her construction as <u>"disabled"</u> by t	human identity is undermined by deirdre's body	sition as an animate
object, an object that vacillates between subjectivity	and the implications for gender/sex, but Moore leaves race untouched.	by the presence of
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Some Alternative Assignments...

• Answer a question that is closely related to the learning goals of the course. Giving students a question to answer, a problem to solve, or a dynamic to explore helps them approach the research task in fresh and creative ways.

• Describe the ongoing conversation on a disciplinary topic, including how to thinkers/authors may diverge in their positions and what standpoints inform those points of agreement/disagreement.

- Read and annotate the references from a key essay's Bibliography.
- Trace a scholars career through key publications.
- Analyze competing book reviews, news responses to an event, or stances in an industry.

Other Tips

• Define the audience students will address. Be sure to discuss the attributes, needs, and values of this audience in class.

• "Scaffolding": break the project down into smaller pieces with deadlines. Even if you can't break the entire project into parts, a few deadlines well before the final due date can be very helpful to take the temperature of ongoing work, establish strong work habits, and allow time for questions, roadblocks, and drafting. (Examples of scaffolding: a proposal, a research plan, an annotated bibliography, a research narrative.) This approach helps to keep students on track and dissuades them from writing the essay a day or two before the final due date.

• Offer models (written by students or professionals) to show the kinds of responses you would like to see.

• Model use of the Library's web tools and resources in class (in brief sessions) so that students are reminded of the many valuable resources found there.

• Discuss what tools like Google or citation generators do and do not offer the researcher, so that students know how to use Google like a researcher might. How and when do you use Google, for instance?

Questions?

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