

Understanding Scholarly References

Information Literacy GEO this assignment addresses: Evaluates, selects, and critically analyzes information. The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system. As a result, “the information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources.”

Students need to understand the importance of the “references and cited sources” in the scholarly literature:

- They constitute the formal means and record of communication among scholars in a field of study, research, and academic discipline.
- They are lists of the sources related to the subject of the scholarly articles published in the scholarly journals, books, essays, etc.
- The authors of the scholarly articles read, review, and examine the literature related to the articles they write in order to:
 - Show the research interest of other scholars in the subject of the article they have published.
 - Present correction(s), follow-up, dispute, or criticism of other works in the same area addressed in their works.
- *Highly* cited authors are most probably the *pioneers* in their field and the subject of the article in hand.

Objectives of the assignment:

- Students become familiar with the importance of the “references” and “cited sources” in the scholarly literature.
- Students identify the *key* authors and *important* article, books, etc. in a given subject.
- Students use “references” and “cited sources” to study their subject of interest from a variety of other scholarly points of view.
- Students use articles, books, etc. listed in the “references” and “cited sources” to gather further information about their topic in an efficient and effective manner.

Preparation:

The instruction process is based on three *interdependent* teaching/learning processes:

1. Teach students how to examine “references” and “cited sources” in the scholarly articles in order to become familiar with the structure of formal scholarly communication.
2. Teach students how to use the literature listed in the “references” and “cited sources” to identify other sources in their subject area.
3. Demonstrate to the students how to identify the *key* literature and the *pioneer* scholars in a given subject.

Instruction Requirements:

Instructors should pre-select several topics in their discipline that will yield a large number of results in an academic database to assure students will be successful following through the assignment.

1. A class-room with computer workstations and online connectivity.
2. Access to a research database with full text articles, and “references” or “cited sources” module. Academic Search Premier is most suitable for the this session
3. Instructor’s station with overhead data projection capability.

Instructional Initiation:

1. Display a scholarly article and its “references” or “cited sources” on the screen.
2. Explain the role of the “references” and “cited sources” in the scholarly communication among those engaged in a field, discipline, etc.

Assignment: Understanding Scholarly References

1. Divide the students into groups of three.
2. Ask each group to select one spokesperson
3. Ask each group to select a topic and search it in the database
4. Instruct the groups to limit their search results to:
 - i. Full text article
 - ii. Scholarly Journals
 - iii. References available
5. As each group to look at the “References Cited” in the database.
6. Ask each group to list the most cited “Reference” in the database
7. Ask each group to search for the author of the most cited “Reference” in the database.
8. Ask each group to verify if the most cited author has also cited the author(s) of the sample article.
9. If answer to task 8 is positive, bring to the students’ attention that it is a case of “reciprocal” referencing, or a two-way scholarly communication.
10. Ask each group to list five articles from the “References Cited” that they find most related to their topic.
11. Ask each spokesperson to come to the instructor’s station and demonstrate to the class the team’s five selected articles.

Important summation/review points:

By becoming familiar with structure of the “references” and “cited sources”, the students will learn:

1. Scholarly literature is the formal mode of scientific communication.
2. References in the scholarly articles demonstrate the structure of communication among the scholars of a field.
3. References in the scholarly article provide an efficient means of identifying articles related to the subject under investigation
4. Scholars give credit to other authors by citing them in their works.
5. Citing resources used in the research process is an ethical, and legal requirement that should be respected by every author, including students.