

WHAT' S YOUR PROBLEM?

1. My students can' t write an organized paper.

Review the ways in which a paper may be organized. Show them samples of logical organization. Discuss various types of organization, such as chronological or progressive. Give them facts to arrange in an outline form, and then ask them to create an outline of points to be included. Have them rank their ideas as “Most Important”, “Important”, and “Interesting” and rank them logically.

2. They say there are no books in the library on their topic.

Are they doing a Keyword search? What terms are they using? Help them develop a list of synonyms. Use the subject headings listed in “near hits” for clues. Have they checked OhioLink? Nearby public libraries? All of those catalogs are online, and Westerville, at least, is very cooperative about issuing library cards to our students. How about articles? If the paper or the topic is not extensive, an article may be more appropriate anyway. Maybe it's time to order some new materials, too.

3. I suspect that they are not writing all of their own papers.

Consider breaking up the assignment and grading each part. Have them write a sample thesis statement (or several of them) when they determine a topic. Require an outline and then a draft of at least part of the final paper. Include a section that expresses their response to the topic or suggestions for improving a situation. Set aside one class session for them to bring in their research articles or monographs and actually write the paper in class.

4. Students are totally unfamiliar with key journals in the discipline.

Make specific assignments in those journals. Ask them to write a review of several articles in an issue. Have them compare the scope and content of articles in several of those key journals. Have the student or a group “sell” the advantages of using a specific journal to the rest of the class. They can't identify key resources in the discipline unless they are exposed to them and made aware of their importance.

5. They can't produce a decent PowerPoint presentation.

If you expect them to use PowerPoint, arrange to teach them. If any of the students in the class are familiar with PowerPoint, give them a sample (simple) presentation and ask them to demonstrate basics to their classmates. IT offers periodic workshops, and they would be pleased to arrange one for your class if you set it up ahead of time. Maybe better – set up a PowerPoint lab time with people who have some expertise so the students can share tips and ideas and also get immediate answers to their questions as they prepare their presentation.

6. All of their sources are from the Web.

Are they? Articles are often delivered over the Internet and are identical to the same articles that are published in print journals. E-books also live in paper and ink, but the tactile version may be checked out or only available from another library.

Require a mix of resources. Consider an annotated bibliography in which the student discusses the primary points or the best information from each resource.

7. Articles that my students use as sources don't really seem appropriate.

A Pew/Internet report on the popularity and importance of search engines reports that “the average visitor scrolled through 1.8 result pages during a typical search.” Internet searchers often do not search more deeply because they find something good enough. Students do the same thing when they search a database. They use articles that appear early in their search and appear to relate to their topic without really searching for the “good stuff”. Help them understand that the best papers rely on the best resources, NOT the most convenient ones. Try a Research Diary showing terms used, databases searched, and rejected results, with reasons.

8. Why can't they come up with a decent thesis statement?

Do they know what a good thesis statement really is? Offer samples and show how they relate to the paper or the article. Be clear as to the purpose of a thesis statement. Gather proposed statements anonymously and solicit class suggestions to strengthen them. Seed the samples with statements from previous classes so no one feels singled out. Suggest an appointment with a tutor at the Writing Center to assist in developing a suitable thesis statement for this paper.

9. Where can they get individual help, besides my office?

Your Library Liaison and the Academic Support Center Writing Center are available and eager to support your teaching and to work with you to develop student learning skills. Consider consulting with us as you are writing your syllabus to discuss ways to strengthen students' information management skills and to restructure your assignments to encourage critical thinking as well as providing opportunities for them to write cogently, concisely and coherently.