Designing assignments to develop information literacy skills
Assignment suggestions:

1. **Prepare brief annotated bibliographies**
   This assignment may ask students to retrieve a variety of sources - articles, books, personal accounts, web sites - and describe the contribution of each source to an understanding of the topic. This can help students develop a sense of the scholarly conversation around a topic.

2. **Retrieve and compare two sources of information on the same topic**
   This helps students become aware of the impact that the author's background, intent and audience may have on the information presented, and may highlight the differences among various disciplines. It works particularly well when students are asked to locate deliberately disparate sources, such as an article from a popular magazine and another from an academic journal[1], articles from conservative and liberal sources[1], articles from different disciplines, journal articles and web sites,a personal and an organizational web site.

3. **Look at the treatment of a topic over time.**
   This can build students' awareness of the process of scholarship on a topic -- what do researchers now know that they didn't know before, how might the social context of research have had impact on a topic, etc. It can work for timespans as limited as two years and as wide as a century. It may also heighten awareness that it is not enough to search the last six months in a database!

4. **Starting with a significant publication or event within the field, prepare a report on the people or issues involved. [1]**
   This helps students contextualize some of the material, and begins to focus them on the research in the discipline.

5. **Review a major journal in the field over time.**
   Through tracing shifts in who is published, what topics are considered of interest, what methodology is used, students develop a sense of a discipline as an evolving entity.

6. **Compare items retrieved by searches using two different search engines or databases. [1]**
   Students learn that indexes, databases and even search engines may have different foci and functions. This helps them learn to make deliberate choices about which finding tool to locate information in various fields, at differing levels, or in differing formats. Searching a general database such as Academic Search Premiere and the standard indexing tool within your discipline might yield some interesting results. (Is the general database useful for an interdisciplinary approach? Are its articles more accessible? Does the specialized index do better for narrow searches?)

7. **Starting with a short article or announcment in the popular press, locate the original research on which the popular article was based. Evaluate the accuracy of the announcement. [1]**
   This highlights the distinction between popular and scholarly press, and helps students understand the differences in audience and level of authority.

8. **Locate and evaluate reviews of books used in the course.**
   The focus here is on analyzing the reception of a piece of research within a field. Students can gain a sense of the conversation within a discipline by reading scholarly

critiques of the material they are reading for class. The retrieval skills it teaches are fairly mechanical and straightforward, but it will acquaint students with local resources, including the basics of finding journals, etc.

9. **Locate and compare two contemporary accounts of an event.**
Heightens awareness of difference in perspective between the immediacy and detail of the contemporary account and the treatment of the event by later scholars. Students are often intrigued with old newspapers and magazines, and finding a topic, then using an index to find another article, helps them understand the use of indexes.

10. **Locate and evaluate the "best" and the "worst" web site on a topic, describing the criteria used and recommending improvements for the "worst"site.**
Students use search engines or directories to locate web sites, and must develop criteria for judging the pertinence and reliability of the information found.

11. **Debates requiring outside research.**
This works well with controversial topics, encouraging students to support their opinions with analyses and data from the field. Requiring a bibliography of the sources they used gives practice in the mechanics of citation, and helps the instructor assess the range of materials they consulted.

12. **Present brief factual background to the class, introducing a new topic.**
Helps students identify when consulting a reference work (print or electronic) is more efficient than looking for articles or books, and helps students invest in the process of the course itself. It also can mesh well with the oral components of the seminar.

13. **Write or present a brief intellectual biography of a scholar identified or read in the course.**
Although care must be taken to select scholars who are prolific enough to leave a traceable trail, students can locate dissertations, articles and books by the individual, and trace shifts or developments in his/her interests or understanding of the field. This might be combined with checking book reviews of a scholar's work over the course of his/her career.

14. **Write a newspaper article on an event.**
The entire class can research an event, with each individual writing a news story on it. In addition to encouraging students to identify important elements and to summarize, the differences among the stories may alert students to the impact a writer's perspective has on writing.

15. **Prepare for a news conference with a scholar read in class, or with a figure involved in some significant event in history.** [6]
Students must research the scholar's or historical figure's general context to decide what questions they would want to ask, and perhaps prepare questions someone from another culture or time period might pose.

16. **Write a proposal for an extended research project.**
This asks students to do almost everything involved with writing a paper, except the actual writing: they must locate and retrieve information in the field, and analyze how it fits together and perhaps where it does not.

17. **Create an anthology of readings on a topic.**
Select a variety of resources on a topic, and write an introduction that explains how they fit together. Another twist on this (from Wesleyan University Library) is to have students

assume they're unable to obtain copyright permission, and so must have a secondary list of resources, with justification for not including them in their optimal collection.

18. **Compare the treatment of the same topic in two different disciplines.**
    This helps students both practice physically locating material and learn to identify the perspectives and approaches of different disciplines.

19. **Locate and summarize information to support an editorial on a topic within the course.** [1]
    This helps student identify information needs that might arise outside class, and highlights the importance of approaching opinions critically.

20. **Locate two scholarly articles on a topic, and compare and evaluate their bibliographies.** [8]
    Students observe both common and unique sources across the articles, and think about the impact the quality of sources can have on the authority of the article.

21. **Create a profile of a species, or of a chemical compound found in a household product.**[9]
    Familiarizes students with the common scientific reference tools, and can introduce them to scientific literature.

* Association of College and Research Libraries/ALA, *Information literacy competency standards for higher education*, endorsed by the American Association for Higher Education, Council of Independent Colleges, and Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2000.
1 "Effective library assignments" <www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/infoserv/lue/effectiveassignments.html> 5/6/04.
2 K. Huber and P. Lewis, "Tired of Term Papers?" *Research Strategies* 2 (1984), 192-199.
3 Joseph, Miriam E. "Term Paper Alternatives." <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/PaperAlternatives.html> 5/6/04
4 "Creating assignments." <www.lib.unb.ca/instruction/assignments.html> 5/6/04
5 VT Sapziano and JL Gibbons, "Brain chemistry and behavior: A new interdisciplinary course" *Journal of Chemical Education* 63 (1986), 398-399.
6 "Ideas for library assignments," <library.ups.edu/instruct/assign.htm>, 5/6/04.
7 "Creating assignments." <www.lib.unb.ca/instruction/assignments.html> 5/6/04
8 "Alternative assignments," <www.library.ohiou.edu/libinfo/depts/refdept/bi/alternatives.htm>, 5/6/04.
9 "Library assignments for lower-division science courses" <Obesci-l@willamette.edu>