Tips for Creating Researched Writing Assignments in the First-Year Seminar
Cynthia A. Cochran, Illinois College, Jacksonville, IL

Try performance tasks to enhance information literacy.

Try following up your summer assignment with additional writing practice requiring research and/or collaboration to give students broader experience at the introductory level.

Students need many introductions to research, writing, and related skills like collaborative writing. There are plenty of ways to use researched writing in a class – and you do not necessarily need to require a fully blown research paper.

One assignment that can help split up a long research paper into steps is the annotated bibliography. Students need to learn that an annotated bibliography is basically a working list of sources, compete with a citation and a brief description or mini-summary of each source, and that such lists are quite useful for their research projects of any size. Researchers use well-done annotated bibliographies to explore their topics. You can use the assignment in different ways. For example, you might ask students to make an annotated bibliography of 10 sources and then help them narrow to the best ones or to replace weak sources with better ones. Or you can use the assignment simply as a way to check their use of documentation rules or to help motivate early starts on research.