



Alternatives to Term Papers

Writing Assignments

Students write a **grant proposal**

- Background, methods, proposed analyses, significance of project

All-but-the-paper term paper

- Students do each step of the research process and then write the introductory and concluding pages, a detailed outline of the body, and an annotated bibliography.

Make a Brochure about a topic/issue

Write a memo (or “white paper”) about a topic/issue

- Students can be asked to write to several different audiences.

Diary entry for a real or fictional character

Meaningful paragraph

- Students are given a list of specific terms relevant to the course/topic of focus and are asked to use those terms in a paragraph to demonstrate an understanding of the terms and their interconnections.

Reflection

- Example: if students have a community engagement component to the course, they discuss how that experience shaped their overall experience in the course/how the experience supplemented the theoretical part of the course.



Culture shifts

- Students select a topic or issue and examine it across time by locating articles on the topic over the past 10, 20, etc. years (using e.g. the *New York Times* historical database).

Pre/post writing assignment

- Assign students a topic at the beginning of the semester that they have to write about given the knowledge they have at that point in time. Then, have them write about that exact same topic (maybe from a slightly different angle; <http://cesl.umass.edu/early-and-end-semester-prepost-writing-assignments>)

Book/film review

Use research to write a **policy proposal** (education, healthcare reform, etc.)

Ask your students to develop a **list of resources** (books, movies, artwork, etc.) that they would **purchase for their topic**. Each resource should be clearly justified. Can give students a limit (e.g., \$1,000)

Identify **three expert viewpoints** on a contemporary issue (can also ask students to actually put these experts in conversation on a topic- can be very creative)

Follow a piece of legislation through Congress that is related to the discipline.

Peer-reviewed versus popular-culture article

- Have students select an article from a popular media source (e.g., Yahoo! News) and then track down the original article that was summarized in that story. Have them evaluate major differences between the two articles.
- To expand on this assignment, you could also then have the student write their *own* “popular news” story about this article, and then reflect on how their approach was different from the other author’s (or the popular source).



Multimodal Assignments

Class debate

Debate “frogger” (TM Stephanie Parisi)

- Place team members with different positions on a topic on each side of the room. They must physically move across to the other side and along the way engage with 3? 4? Folks from the “other side” of the debate and discuss their differing opinions. Once they get to the “other side” have them report back on what they learned, if they viewpoint changed, and if so, how it changed.

Class “conference”

- Students do some kind of project and then develop a poster that they have to present to their peers (and maybe others in the department?) in a conference format. Could score posters and have awards.

Curate an exhibit

- This could be imaginary, actual (see if Woodruff Library has space), or virtual (OMEKA).

Develop a “documentary”/ digital storytelling

- Students present all of the information they would have in a term paper but in video format. ECDS can help with this.

Present a case study

- Similar to Grand Rounds format

“Shark Tank”

- Have students propose a new idea, invention, or research project (basically a grant proposal) and then pitch it to the instructor(s) and their peers.

Website design

- Have students work together to create a website about a topic decided on in class.

Blogging assignment

- Blogging may have a writing component but should also involve other media.



Work of art, music, architecture, sculpture, etc.

Teach the class/run discussion

- This could be especially useful for students to delve deeper into a specific topic; have students pair up (or can be done individually) and teach a class (or half a class, probably most feasible) on a topic of their choice.

Create an infographic

- Have students develop a visual representation of something that is more quantitative or data driven. This can be done with markers and pens OR using Piktochart if you want something more finished and professional.

Policy mapping

- Map out, in pictures how a policy works and what impact it has.

Additional Resources

Lawrence University

- https://www.lawrence.edu/library/departments/research_instruction/assignment_design/alternatives_to_term_papers

Oberlin College

- <http://www.oberlin.edu/library/programs/assignments/alternatives.html>

Indiana University

- <https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/assessing-student-learning/alternatives-traditional-exams-papers/>

Clark College

- <http://library.clark.edu/?q=faculty-ideas-assignments>

Lone Star College

- <http://www.lonestar.edu/library/14655.htm>

Carson-Newman University

- <http://www.cn.edu/undergraduate/resources/library/library-services/faculty-services/library-assignments-research-paper-alternatives>

