

## Using WebQuests to Improve Research Skills

*Brad Williams, Systems Administrator, Kingsway College, Oshawa, ON*

With the Internet becoming a widely accepted tool to satisfy classroom research, steps need to be taken to ensure students are able to use appropriate online resources for informational purposes.

When I was at Andrews University in 1997, the Internet was quickly becoming the resource of choice. I was determined to avoid opening a book in the library for any research project, and for the most part I was successful. That being said, I also managed to rewrite history on occasion and state “facts” that earned me less than desirable marks. We had access to a great resource, yet none of us knew how to use it properly. Eleven years later, students are still struggling with online research. With the immense number of articles and websites available to students, it’s even more difficult to make appropriate resource choices. What purpose does research serve if inaccurate information is being digested?

One way of alleviating this concern is by using WebQuests. A WebQuest is an inquiry-based task where all the information required to complete the assignment is gleaned from the Internet. The intent is to encourage students to use their time more efficiently. Instead of spending time searching for material, they focus instead on digesting and analyzing specific resources selected by the teacher. The WebQuest helps ensure that students stay focused while they are online. The final product is a practical application of information, such as an oral presentation or a brochure. This simulates the way research can be used in real-world settings. WebQuests can be group or individual activities. In a group activity, each individual can take on a different set of responsibilities or area of expertise. The group members then collaborate to fulfill the task requirements.

The five components of a WebQuest are: introduction, task, process, evaluation, and conclusion. The *introduction* is intended to prepare and hook the students. This section sets the stage for the assignment and identifies the learning objective. The *task* identifies the end result or culminating activity of the WebQuest (the format the information and analysis will take). The *process* outlines the steps the students should take, as well as the online resources to be used. There will also be some guidance provided in this section to aid the students in organizing their research. The *evaluation* stage informs the learners how their work will be assessed. The students will be made aware of the teacher’s expectations of their research as well as the components of the final project. The *conclusion* will summarize what the students have learned by completing the activity. It may also encourage them to think beyond the scope of the assigned lesson.

WebQuests are highly adaptable. They can focus on a single subject or touch on several areas to meet cross-curricular requirements. Grade 1 students may use simple WebQuests to research barnyard animals and create zoo posters, while high school seniors may research the causes of the Russian Revolution and use the information to create a propaganda brochure accompanied by a short oral presentation. This type of assignment caters to various learning styles.

Teachers may choose to employ WebQuests in one of two ways. Those who are familiar with website creation can put the assignment and links online so that students can access all aspects of the assignment electronically. Those unfamiliar with creating websites can simply create a handout that includes all the components of the WebQuest. If creating a WebQuest seems daunting, you may choose to search online for existing WebQuests created by other teachers that may fit in with your current units. Websites also exist that are designed to help you create your own.

Below is a link to a WebQuest group project on acid rain created by teachers in the Sir Wilfred Laurier School board.

<http://www.swlauriersb.qc.ca/english/edservices/pedresources/webquest/rainwq.htm>

For additional existing WebQuests and additional information, simply enter “WebQuests” in your search engine of choice. The WebQuest just might be the thing your students need to improve their research skills.