



## Information Literacy

### What exactly is “information literacy”?

The ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* defines information literacy as “the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.” (Association of College & Research Libraries. 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>)

Information literacy in practice requires:

- competence in using information technology
  - understanding how information is created, published, organized, and accessed
  - being able to frame questions using subject-appropriate terms
  - applying appropriate criteria to evaluate and select relevant and authoritative sources
  - using information to create new knowledge, crediting others’ intellectual property in discipline-appropriate reference styles
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### How “information literate” are students?

[Explore NSSE scores through Commonwealth University’s Institutional Effectiveness. For Bloomsburg, when this Teaching Tip was written in 2018] the short answer is – about as information literate as students at many other institutions are. Data from the NSSE Topical Module for Information Literacy for 2 years (2015 & 2016) shows BU freshmen and seniors are average in their information literacy competencies.

Project Information Literacy, <https://projectinfoilit.org/>, a large-scale nationwide research study of undergraduate information-seeking strategies and research practices, found that most students experienced difficulty with research when defining a topic, narrowing it, and filtering irrelevant results.

Not surprisingly, PIL also found in their follow-up studies that “students lacked the research acumen for framing an inquiry in the digital age where information abounds and intellectual discovery was paradoxically overwhelming for them.” (*Truth Be Told: How College Students Evaluate and Use Information in the Digital Age*. 2010. Project Information Literacy Progress Report). Check out their website for additional publications.

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### What can faculty do to help students develop better information literacy skills?

- **Assess students’ current level of information literacy prior to an assignment.** Students may be heavy consumers of technology but most likely are not proficient at academic research. Ask students to demonstrate their ability rather than self-report it. For example, can they recognize and

locate scholarly articles? Can they ‘read’ citations and differentiate between those for articles, books, and book chapters?

- **Consider alternative assignments** to the traditional term paper. The Library’s Information Literacy site lists some, and others may be found in discipline-specific journals. When searching for assignments, use alternative keywords such as ‘critical thinking,’ ‘research skills,’ ‘digital literacy,’ or ‘information seeking.’
  - **Collaborate with a librarian.** Librarians can collaborate in developing assignments with appropriate information literacy outcomes. They also can provide information literacy instruction to your students either in class or outside of class. In addition, they can develop instructional materials, like online tutorials and subject guides, for your classes. Contact your department’s library faculty liaison for more info.
  - **Encourage your students to contact a librarian** for help with their research. Add your liaison librarian’s contact info to your syllabus and to your D2L/BOLT course.
  - **Track information literacy student learning outcomes** in your courses and your department’s curriculum. Ideally, students should be able to demonstrate information literacy competency by their senior year in a capstone project.
  - **Provide students with multiple opportunities** to practice information research strategies in order to develop deep learning pathways and proficiency. IL is not ‘one and done.’
  - **Explore IL curricula** such as the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education Sandbox, <https://sandbox.acrl.org>, for ideas on how to use the Framework in your classes and to share your ideas with other educators (it requires that you create a free account). The Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) maintains the wiki [Information Literacy in the Disciplines](#) with links to curricula developed by accrediting agencies, professional associations, and institutions of higher education for information literacy.
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## What are the challenges to teaching and learning information literacy?

Many faculty believe students have already mastered information research skills in high school or will develop these abilities on their own in college (McGuinness, 2006), but this is simply not true for many students. The problem is due both to the increased emphasis on high-stakes testing in K-12 schools and to the reality that many schools have eliminated their school library and librarians to cut costs (*PA School Library Research Project*, <http://paschoollibraryproject.org/home/schlibresearch>).

As a result, many high school students come to college lacking even rudimentary information research skills. Unless their college courses require them to develop information competency through assignments and projects, they have little incentive to learn other strategies besides going to Google, Wikipedia, and others for information.

Faculty often report they feel there is too little time to incorporate information literacy outcomes into their courses (McGuinness, 2006). One effective workaround is to include information literacy processes into those assignments that are designed to teach students about the conventions and norms of disciplinary discourse, especially writing. Yes, revising courses to include information literacy outcomes takes time, but including them often results the benefit of improved student learning and writing.

Information literacy is learned over time through repeated practice in a variety of contexts. Information literacy is part of lifelong learning, enabling individuals not only to find answers to daily life questions but

also to continue to develop professionally in their fields after graduation and be able to use evidence for decision-making.

### The Six Frames

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

from the ACRL's *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*,  
<https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

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### From the *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report*

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Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand.

### Further Reading

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- Thompson, P. (2013). The digital natives as learners: Technology use patterns and approaches to learning. *Computers & Education* 65, 12-33.
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