

Information Literacy

1 What is it?

The term information literacy refers to being able to use information effectively to learn. In higher education, students need to use information to participate in learning activities and complete their course assignments. While there are general information skills they need to know to be successful in college, students also must learn the specific ways information is used to investigate and communicate in their discipline or profession.

2 Why is it important?

Advances in technology beginning in the 20th century resulted in ubiquitous information. Having huge amounts of information at their fingertips requires that students use a variety of strategies to effectively navigate and learn from the information they may encounter. Navigation strategies include such things as being able to evaluate, sort, analyze, synthesize, and communicate information. Every community, such as scholars in the same discipline, a group of professionals, or members of a civic or religious group, have specific ways to use information. For example, they may rely heavily on organizational standards to do their work, or value book-length publications over journal articles. Across a college curriculum, students need to learn the information practices of the communities in which they are immersed. Being able to use the information to learn in different contexts fosters success in:

- Academic pursuits
- Professional endeavors
- Civic engagement

3 How to do it?

Whether integrating it into your entire course, or into one assignment, you should be intentional

concerning how you want your students to learn to use information. Your learning goals related to information literacy should be made explicit in your:

- Learning outcomes
- Assessments
- Learning activities

The specific ways you want your students to learn to use information in your course should be described in one or more learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes related to using information need to be assessed. While this could happen by including information literacy-related questions on an exam, it may be more effective to evaluate how students use information to complete assignments, such as an academic poster, paper or project.

To enable students to use information in the context of learning, learning activities should be designed to teach students disciplinary content while they are using information in new ways. Ideally, information literacy would be scaffolded across a curriculum, so that students are required to learn to use information with more complexity as they advance academically and professionally.

Tips and Tricks

- **Give specific instructions about how your students need to use information to complete assignments:** Often assignment prompts indicate the amount of sources students are required to use for a project, such as 4 peer-reviewed journal articles, and 2 news articles. While these directions may be intended to encourage students to be thorough in their investigation of a topic, assignment prompts need to relay specific directions to students to guide how they are to use (e.g.: evaluate, analyze, synthesize, etc.) information sources.

- **Determine your students' capabilities related to using information:** At the beginning of the course you will want to gauge students' ability to use information and then craft assignments that extend their capabilities.
- **Identify disciplinary information skills:** Consider the information practices used in your discipline and determine which of them are appropriate for students to learn in your course.

4 Additional Resources

If you are a Purdue user and interested in consulting with a librarian to develop assignments in which students learn about using information, please contact Dr. Clarence Maybee, Associate Professor and Information Literacy Specialist for the Purdue Libraries, via email at cmaybee@purdue.edu.

- [Communications in Information Literacy](#) (open-access journal)
- [Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education](#) (Association of College and Research Libraries)
- [Information Literacy Value Rubric](#) (Association of American Colleges & Universities)
- [Journal of Information Literacy](#) (open-access journal)
- [Project Information Literacy](#)
- Basic Search Strategies for Research Databases by Purdue Libraries: [Video 1](#) & [Video 2](#)
- [How to determine if an article is scholarly](#)
- [Copyright Overview](#)
- [Copyright Infographic](#)

5 References

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