Framework for Information Literacy

A new approach for Information Literacy Instruction

In 2000, the Academic, College, & Research Libraries (ACRL) promulgated the **Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,** which librarians and faculty have used to teach and assess information literacy. This thorough set of objectives, outcomes, and performance indicators codified the skills and knowledge for academic research and beyond academia. According to the Standards,

> Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. . . .
>
> An information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally (Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, 2000)

The intervening years have brought technological evolution to the information environment, including more ability for students to produce--not just consume--information. Also, there is a growing awareness of the affective and sense-making aspects of learning, as well as metacognition, or self-awareness of learning.

Therefore, ACRL developed the **Framework for Information Literacy** to focus more on pedagogical strategies and on foundational concepts that help students understand how information operates and how they interact with it.

> Information literacy is 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. (Framework, 2015)

The Framework organizes skills and dispositions around "threshold concepts" that, once understood, allow the student to attain a new threshold of understanding (Framework, 2015, para 2). These are "metaliteracies" that transcend particular information tools or tasks, and include a more reflective and critical understanding of the information ecosphere in which the student creates and uses information. Once understood, they can be applied in multiple situations (Framework, 2015, para 4).

After much thought and consultation, the **Academic, College, & Research Libraries (ACRL)** in 2016 rescinded the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education that had been the "standard" since 2000 and now promotes the Framework of Information Literacy instead. Although the Framework's new approach to information literacy instruction is very different, it does incorporate

concepts and processes from the Standards. Unlike the positivistic Standards that focused on skills and measurable outcomes for students to meet, the Framework treats information literacy as a set of concepts to teach students about information production and use. This more sophisticated understanding in turn facilitates critical thinking in the use of information.

The framework treats outcomes as situational. Each syllabus and program must work out their unique goals and outcomes. Rather than prescribe a list of skills that benchmark across learning situations, the Framework is a set of concepts that customize instruction to particular learning situations, including discipline and level (Framework, para 2). The Framework gives librarians and faculty guidance for teaching students the skills and dispositions that will help them to critically think about their use of information, but librarians and faculty must develop outcomes as needed.

Therefore, faculty and librarians are encouraged to collaborate to develop information literacy activities and assignments and assess them based on their unique learning goals.

Below are the threshold concepts of the Information Literacy Framework (in no particular order). For more detail, including knowledge practices and dispositions for each, see the ACRL Framework document itself.

Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required.

Information Creation as a Process

Information in any format is produced to convey a message and is shared via a selected delivery method. The iterative processes of researching, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences.

Information Has Value

Information possesses several dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means to influence, and as a means of negotiating and understanding the world. Legal and socioeconomic interests influence information production and dissemination.

Research as Inquiry

Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field.

Scholarship as Conversation

Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations.

Searching as Strategic Exploration

Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops.

Resources:

Burkhardt, J. M. (2016). Teaching Information Literacy Reframed. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.

Hofer, A. R., Townsend, L., & Brunetti, K. (2012). Troublesome concepts and information literacy threshold concepts for IL instruction. *Portal: Libraries and the Academy, 12*(4), 387-405.

Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. (2000). Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency

Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. (2015). Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework