



Incorporating Information Literacy into the Curriculum: A Faculty Guide

Information Literacy is fundamental to academic success. Information Literacy is the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use information. The integration of these competencies into your curriculum challenges students to improve both the quality of their assignments and their thinking abilities. The Librarians at River Valley Community college encourage your involvement in this process. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with practical suggestions and strategies for ways to incorporate information literacy into your courses.

i. Scholarly Communication

An information Literate first year student is able to: Understand that scholars and practicing professionals in their discipline generate, control and use information in very particular ways.

Strategy: Make the invisible visible; foreground your own process; talk about how/why you selected readings for the course: why were these particular articles selected? Highlight your own critical thinking process regarding assigned readings, suggested topics, your own research etcetera-things not usually apparent to students

Potential discussion topics:

- What's the current state of research in this field?
- What kinds of things are being written, discussed and presented?
- Where are they being published/presented—Online? Print? And why?
- How is information structured in this discipline?
- How are questions formulated and new ideas disseminated in the discipline?
- What kinds of information sources are used in the discipline?
- What's the publishing culture in the discipline?
- Who are the publishers and what role do they play in the construction (not just production) of knowledge in the discipline?
- How do people access information in the discipline?
- How might research methods and contexts vary in different disciplines?

Potential exercise:

- Write a brief outline of the ways in which the ordering, production and dissemination of research might shape the development of new knowledge

ii. Types of Materials

An information literate first year student is able to: Understand that popular and scholarly material exists on most any topic; distinguish between these types of materials and determine when it's appropriate to use each type and why.

Strategy: Consider the source and audience. Work with students to help them understand why being able to distinguish between these types of material is important.

Potential discussion topics:

- How can you tell if a source is “scholarly.” What visual cues are associated with scholarly sources?
- How can you tell if a source is “popular.” What visual cues typify popular sources?
- If a source cannot clearly be identified as scholarly or popular how should it be considered in the research process?
- When might it be useful and/or necessary to use articles in popular or alternative sources?

Potential exercises:

- Have students identify and compare a scholarly article and a popular article that treat the same topic
- Give students several scholarly articles and ask them to identify the common features among the articles
- Provide students with a variety of resources and have them make arguments about whether and why they would classify each as being scholarly

Keep in mind: Students should be reminded that not everything is available on the free web; the current generation of college students may not be accustomed to or comfortable with using print sources.

iii. Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources

An information literate first year student is able to: Distinguish between primary and secondary resources in a given context and/or a given discipline; determine when it's appropriate to use these types of resources and why.

Strategy: Consider the context. Engage students in active thinking about what primary/secondary means in a given discipline, and why, in making these distinctions, “context is everything.”

Potential discussion topics:

- What might be some general rules about what constitutes primary and secondary sources in different fields of study
- What are the potential ambiguities and blurring of distinctions inherent in determining whether a source is primary or secondary dependent upon the question being asked, and when it's being posed [the time/date concept]?
- Ask students to consider a particular source and think about whether these are circumstances under which it might be considered a primary source, and other circumstances under which it might be considered a secondary source.
- Have students consider various kinds of writing they have done and discuss whether these materials would be considered a primary or secondary sources, and under what circumstances.

Potential exercises:

- Give students several research questions/theses and have them make a list of the kinds of primary resource materials scholars might seek in each case
- Have students evaluate a primary source; what was the purpose/intent of the sources, who was its author/originator

iv. Information Sources

An information literate first year student is able to: Understand the nature of different types of publications and why and when they are useful.

Strategy: Explain format. Examine the relationship/relative roles of different types of information sources.

Potential discussion topics:

- The general features of books and articles—what do they “do” differently and what are the typical roles of each in the research process?
- How the role of books, journal articles and other types of publications differ in different disciplines
- Trace the progression of an event/discovery/idea/theory from forms of publication in informal/popular sources to forms of publication in formal/scholarly sources [or vice-versa]

Potential exercises:

- Have students compare and contrast treatment of a specific topic/question/issue in a book and in an article
- Have students identify a topic for which the majority of published information would be in article form [a recent trend or field of exploration]
- Tracking the flow of information; have students look at a given event/trend/theory and track its evolution

v. Intellectual Property

An information literate first year student is able to: Understand plagiarism and intellectual property issues

Strategy: An ounce of prevention. Through discussion at various levels and at various points, help students understand the nature of intellectual property and related issues such as plagiarism.

Potential discussion topics:

- The notion of common knowledge—how do they determine if an idea is common knowledge in the field or unique to an author
- Mindfulness of these issues is more about ethical responsibility than pursuit of “original thought”
- How does research in an electronic environment, where so much content is available full-text online, impact issues of intellectual property?
- Recent high profile cases in the media such as Doris Kearns Goodwin and Stephen Ambrose

Potential exercises:

- Give students excerpts from books/articles and have them practice paraphrasing and quoting and properly citing the material

Keep in mind: Two excellent ways to prevent unintentional plagiarism; requires staged assignments with multiple drafts and have students keep research logs

vi. Research Process

An information literate first year student is able to: Understand different types of bibliographic citations and be able to use a style manual to correctly document information sources in many different formats.

Strategy: Map it out. Outline the basic format of books and periodical citations and discuss the differences. Show how anthologies or collected essays are cited.

Potential discussion topics:

- Review citations on the syllabus going over detailed components of given citations
- Distribute sample citations and “dissect” them so students will know which ones are for articles, books, essays etcetera

Potential exercises:

- Provide citations from various bibliographies and databases. Have students label the parts of the citations and identify them
- Have students turn in citations in proper format with early drafts of papers. Alternately, require a bibliography be turned in early in the semester with citations in the proper format.

Keep in mind: Modeling good citing behavior on your syllabus makes a difference; provide complete citations for all course materials, whether required textbooks, reserve readings, materials in course packs.

vii. Research Strategy

An information literate first year student is able to: Formulate a research strategy, and understand the process through which questions are refined and redefined in the course of research.

Strategy: Focus on process. Help students understand that research is not generally a linear process, but one that can involve many trajectories-some meandering, some parallel, some competing and some even unfruitful.

Potential discussion topics:

- Walk through the process of topic formulation, from general interest to statements of the research question/problem
- Share experiences where research was stymied or blossomed based on what was found while researching; dispel the myth that the perfect answer exists for every question even the “obvious” ones

Potential exercises:

- Have students keep logs on the ways their topic changes and evolves as they do research and encounter more information
- Have students states the question/problem and then consider what kinds of information sources will be needed to answer the question

Keep in mind: Having students submit bibliographies at various stages of research process has multiple benefits: they can't procrastinate "too" much, they'll find out sooner rather than later how much material is available on a given topic, and they'll get used to keeping track of bibliographic data as they go along rather than scrambling to produce bibliographies at the end of the process.

viii. Resources

An information literate first year student is able to: Determine what resources/databases are appropriate to answer the question

Strategy: Teach tool savvy. Make students aware of the existence of appropriate reference sources, databases, indexes.

Potential discussion topics:

- Roles/uses of different types of sources throughout the research process
- Match a research question to the methods of scholarly communication in this field. Who would be interested in this question? Where and how would they communicate/publish? And which tools would you use to locate those publications/communications?

Potential exercises:

- Have students state which resources they will use to find the kinds of information they said they needed
- Have students consult two reference sources to answer a particular question and compare the treatment of the topic in the two sources; have them note what else the tool could be used for
- Have students conduct a search for the same topic in two different databases and compare/contrast the results

ix. Searching

An information literate first year student is able to: Distill a complicated research question into searchable concepts/keywords/synonyms

Strategy: Teach searching savvy. Help students understand that they can't enter their thesis/topic sentence into a database and get a coherent result.

Potential discussion topics:

- Importance of being flexible when approaching different information sources
- Importance of identifying synonyms for a given topic/concept
- Research as a creative process
- Importance of keeping a list of key terms/synonyms while investigating a topic; as new terms are learned research tools may need to be re-checked

Potential exercises:

- Have students diagram their research statement-pick out the most important keywords, brainstorm synonyms and related concepts; will truncation be helpful? Boolean operators?
- Have students describe their topics in a few sentences then have them indicate what terms or search statements they will use in searching various sources

- Ask students to chart the changes in their thinking about the topic based on the results of their searching

x. Evaluate Information

An information literate first year student is able to: Critically evaluate information for usefulness, bias, currency and authority

Strategy: Resource evaluation as critical thinking. Help students understand that any and all resources they encounter regardless of format should be judged and evaluated using particular criteria

Potential discussion topics:

- Are there set criteria upon which sources in this field are evaluated?
- Which are the most important criteria?
- Do the criteria vary depending on the type of source?

Potential exercise:

- Have small groups examine texts/websites etcetera and evaluate them according to agreed upon criteria

Credits

This is an adaptation of Incorporating Information Literacy into Oberlin's First Year Seminars Faculty Guide Oberlin College, May 2002. [Rev. May 2003] found here: <http://www.oberlin.edu/library/programs/fys/guide.pdf>
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