WHAT IS INFORMATION LITERACY/WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

In a nutshell, information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It refers to a set of characteristics that transform an ordinary student into a “wise information consumer/creator” and “life long learner”. Information literacy is more than just a general education requirement; “information literate” is something you become. This happens through your coursework (e.g., research assignments and learning about your field of study), and also through personal experiences and interactions with information at home (e.g., choosing the safest car or best doctor), in the workplace (e.g., making wise decisions and sharing information with colleagues), and throughout life (e.g., determining the best candidate for political office).

Some aspects of information literacy involve using various information technologies. Others include critical evaluation of the information you find and the ethical use of information and information technologies. The hallmarks of an information literate individual include problem solving by using technologies to find and manage information as well as critically evaluating and ethically applying information. Other characteristics include the spirit of inquiry and perseverance to find out what is necessary to solve problems or complete tasks.

Today’s employers are looking for people who can understand and adapt to the characteristics of the information age. If a person has “learned how to learn,” he or she is a much more attractive job applicant. As employees, information literate individuals with strong analytical skills, critical thinking skills, and problem solving skills make valuable contributions because they are prepared to adapt to a changing environment and think through work assignments or problems.

WHO NEEDS INFORMATION LITERACY/HOW IS IT DONE?

Everyone has a certain level of information literacy education. For instance, school children know that if they need help, they can ask their parents or teachers. As they get older, they become more independent and learn how to find other sources of information through libraries and the Internet. By the time students enter college, they should have a basic set of information literacy competencies. However, these skills will continue to adapt and improve through college and beyond.

Chances are, you won’t really notice that you are becoming more information literate. Information literacy is a “way of being/process of becoming.” It’s not really just one class that you take and then you are done with it. At WSU, you meet the IL requirement after
taking a LIBS course. However, IL is embedded throughout the curriculum, in both general education and within your major field of study. As you continue your education, you’ll accrue skills and abilities that you can use in other classes.

INFORMATION LITERACY: DEFINITIONS

The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) recently expanded its definition of information literacy to emphasize flexibility, individual growth, critical self-reflection, and collaboration. According to ACRL (2016, p.3), information literacy is a “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”.

The construct of information literacy is made up of a set of six interconnected core concepts that cover ideas about information, communication, research, and scholarship, and focuses on students as both consumers as well as creators of information. These are:

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.
Weber State University has outlined an institutional definition of information literacy as it applies to our students, and this definition is based on these six core concepts. Students have achieved a basic level of information literacy when they have met the following four outcomes:

**OUTCOME 1: RESEARCH AS AN EXPLORATORY PROCESS**
Using tools and techniques to address information needs while understanding that the research process is often iterative and nonlinear.

Learning Indicators:
- understand information needs, determine the appropriate scope of a project, and formulate focused research questions or thesis statements accordingly
- match information needs with search strategies and search tools
- understand that the research process is often iterative and non-linear

**OUTCOME 2: SCHOLARSHIP AS COMMUNICATION**
Scholarly communication is a conversation between creators of information with a variety of backgrounds and perspectives.

Learning Indicators:
- identify and describe the characteristics of various resource types and formats, recognizing their value and contribution to scholarly communication
- recognize that a given scholarly work may not represent the sole or majority perspective on an issue
- recognize the value of information literacy outside the academic setting

**OUTCOME 3: CRITICALLY EVALUATE INFORMATION**
It is important to evaluate the quality of all information based on its context.

Learning Indicators:
- define different types of authority, such as subject expertise or special experience, and use research tools and indicators to evaluate the credibility of authors and sources
- recognize that authoritative content may be packaged formally or informally, may include sources of all media types, and may be perceived differently based on the format, but all sources should be critically evaluated
OUTCOME 4: ETHICAL USE OF INFORMATION
Legal and ethical standards are important to the dissemination, retention, and study of information sources.

Learning Indicators:
• identify different types of plagiarism and avoid them through proper attribution and citation
• articulate the purpose and characteristics of ethical and legal issues surrounding the use of information, such as copyright, fair use, open access, Creative Commons, and the public domain