

## Teaching Tip: Teaching Information Literacy



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As teachers we often bemoan the tendency of students today to use any internet website as a source of information in their papers and assignments. We tell them they aren't good sites for information for academic purposes, and they use them anyway. So how can we get them to be a little more critical in the resources they use from the internet? By teaching them information literacy skills.

Information literacy involves four steps: 1) recognizing the need for information, 2) identifying sources of information, 3) evaluating the quality of the information, and 4) sharing the information.

To support your students' learning of information literacy skills try to develop assignments and activities that scaffold the full process. We often assign students research papers assuming they know how to do research. The reality is that very few of our students have developed strong research skills. By creating scaffolded research assignments we can help them develop their information literacy skills one stage at a time.

For more on information literacy check out [Information Literacy in the Electronic Age](#) prepared by the Vanier library.

### 4 Steps in Information Literacy

#### 1. Identifying the need for information

The first step in doing research is recognizing that you will need more information to have a full understanding of the issue, to find a solution to a problem, or the answer to a question. Information can be needed in all kinds of scenarios, not just in research projects. If you need to do something you've never done before, where do you go to find out how to do it? Think about all the ways students might need information in your courses and help them learn tools and techniques to find that information on their own.

Examples of assignments:

- Do a brainstorming activity with students, then identify the topics they know about and the ones for which they would need more information.
- Have your students write down one or two things they already know about a particular topic, and one thing they don't understand. Ask them to make an "educated guess" for their question given what they already know. Follow this activity up with some research to help them assess if their "educated guess" was accurate or if it needs adjusting.
- If they are doing a research project for your course, have them start by developing a research question, or a question they would like to have answered once they have completed their research. Good research always starts with a good question.

## 2. Finding information

What kinds of sources can you use to get the information you need? Does it need to be really current? Does it need to present different perspectives on a situation? Does it need to have statistics? Does it need to be scholarly? Does it need to show you how to do something?

If it needs to be current you might want to do a Google search online. If it needs to be current and scholarly you might want to look in online databases. If you need to see different perspectives you should probably try to find a few different articles written from different positions on the issue. If you need to be shown how to do something you might want to find a video.

After you have decided where to look for your information you need to decide how to find the information you need in those sources. Knowing how to adjust your search with search terms or keywords can help you narrow in on the information you need. Check out the [Top Ten Database Search Tips](#) tutorial from the Vanier library for tips and tricks on how to use search terms to find the information you need.

Examples of assignments:

- Have students submit a list of keywords they will use to research a topic. Have them include search options to narrow or expand their search.
- If you can book a computer lab, have students start doing their research in class using the online databases. Provide support to them when they need to make adjustments and show them how to save their search results and articles with the full bibliographic information.
- Have students find an article online for a current event or discovery in your field.
- Have students find two articles presenting opposing viewpoints on an issue.
- Have students find a video demonstrating how to use a skill needed for the course.

## 3. Evaluating information

Is this information useful to you? Does it answer your need or your question? Does it present enough of the situation to be able to understand it from different perspectives? Is it from a reliable or reputable source? If not, what are its biases and why are they there?

Once you have found some information you need to decide if it is reliable. Even articles published in books and journals can have biases and misinterpretations. You will need to look at the source of the information, decide what their bias might be, what their purpose is in presenting the information and what errors or misjudgements they might be making. Reading a number of articles on the same topic can help you identify these factors. For other useful tips on evaluating your resources check out the [Evaluating Articles](#) tutorial from the Vanier library

Examples of assignments:

- Have students prepare an annotated bibliography where they look at the author's purpose, audience and biases.
- Provide students with an academic text and a popular media text on the same issue. As a group, analyse the differences in how the information is presented in both texts.
- Once your students have done some research, have them submit one question or issue that they still find unclear in their research. Help them to find additional sources to answer this question.

- If your students submitted a research question to you before doing their research, have them re-evaluate their question and develop a thesis with their new information.

#### 4. Sharing information

What is the best format for sharing your information? Is it writing a paper? Giving an oral presentation? Making a video? Preparing a checklist or procedures?

There are a lot of ways to present information. To find the best way you need to ask yourself what information you want to present and who your audience will be. If you are trying to present an argument or discuss different perspectives on an issue you might want to write a paper. If you want to discuss the key elements of a given issue and some possible solutions with a particular group of people you may want to do a presentation. If you want to show someone how to perform a particular task you might want to do a demonstration or make a video.

Examples of assignments to present information:

- Written paper
- Journal response
- Forum discussions
- Oral presentation
- Video recording
- Live demonstration
- Checklist or procedures list

#### Even More Information Literacy

The Association of College and Research Libraries has recently expanded on some of the stages in information literacy. These changes have focused on how this information is used and include:

- Adding the new information to your knowledge base.
- Using the information for a specific purpose.
- Understanding the ethical and legal issues of accessing and using the information.

For more information on these additional skills, and for resources on information literacy check out the [Association of College and Research Libraries](#) webpage. In particular, you might want to check out their [list of performance outcomes](#) for each stage.