Information Literacy Guide

What is information literacy?

Information literacy is defined as the ability to access, evaluate, organize, and use the best, most current information available from a variety of sources.

The A.M. Al-Refai Library has developed this Information Literacy Guide to help students in their literature search. It will equip students and staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to use the library’s information resources effectively.

A research process for literature search involves the following:

- Identify the information you need
- Know the purpose and suitability of the resources available
- Develop an appropriate research plan
- Evaluate the worth and relevance of the information retrieved
- Document information and its sources
- Organize information

Identify the information you need

✓ What questions do you need answered?
✓ Identify the main concept and scrutinize the scope of the topic

Know the purpose and suitability of the resources available

✓ Distinguish academic vs. popular, primary vs. secondary resources
✓ Understand that the library catalog leads to resources in the library, but does NOT contain details at chapter/journal article level. Know how to interpret A.M. Al-Refai Library holdings
✓ Distinguish the different types of literature, e.g. reference books, textbooks, journal articles
✓ Understand that library databases contain indexed subject references to journal articles, books, reports, etc. Databases can be of different types – index, abstract, full-text with different subject coverage
✓ Understand that the Internet leads to some excellent information, but results need to be evaluated
✓ Use varied sources of information

Develop an appropriate research plan

✓ Create the search terms/phrase (keywords)
✓ Identify the resources that are relevant to your research
✓ Execute the search by linking the keywords with Boolean operators and narrowing the results to retrieve appropriate information quickly

Evaluate the worth and relevance of the information retrieved

✓ Review the relevance of the information retrieved
✓ Understand and apply criteria for evaluating the information
✓ Identify inaccuracies and misinformation in the information retrieved
Document information and its sources
✓ Document all search strategies, sources used and location of sources
✓ Acknowledge/reference sources using standard reference styles (MLA, APA, etc)

Organize information
✓ Combine information from various sources to compile your research
✓ View/Save/Print/email information retrieved from various sources
✓ Maintain a backup of the research

Description and examples of sources that may be used for a literature search

Guides to literature search: Explain how to conduct a literature research

Example: Texas Information Literacy Tutorial (TILT) (http://tilt.snow.edu/nf/intro/internet.htm) is a very comprehensive information literacy Website with online modules that walk you through a range of topics and discuss the issues involved in selecting, searching and evaluating information.

Library catalog: The library online catalog contains over 40,000 bibliographic records for the books, e-books, journals, and audiovisual materials available in the library. Each record consists of fields such as author, title, publisher, item location, call number, description, bibliography and subject.

Example: A.M. Al-Refai library catalog

Databases: A database is a collection of information organized in such a way that a computer program can quickly select desired pieces of data. The A.M. Al-Refai Library subscribes to bibliographic and full-text databases. These databases allow you to find articles in journals, magazines and newspapers. They can also contain references to book reviews, conference proceedings, reports, book chapters and other publications. These databases can contain a mixture of record types including full text, abstracts or citations.

Example: Academic Search Premier, JSTOR

Monographs (books): A monograph is a scholarly piece of writing of essay or book length on a specific, often limited, subject.

Example:

Poetry Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of the Most Significant and Widely Studied Poets of World Literature (PN 1010 .P499 vol.79 2008)


The Longman Anthology of Women's Literature (PR 1110 .W6 L66 2000)
Journals: An academic journal is a peer-reviewed periodical containing scholarly articles in a recognized field of study.

Example:

American Literature, Early American Literature

Dictionaries: A dictionary is a book of alphabetically listed words in a specific language, with definitions, etymologies, pronunciations, and other information.

Example:


Encyclopedias: A comprehensive reference work containing articles on a wide range of subjects or on numerous aspects of a particular field, usually arranged alphabetically.

Example:


Encyclopedia of American Literature of the Sea and Great Lakes (eBook)

Bibliographies: A bibliography is a list of citations for books, periodical articles or other materials. Published bibliographies on specific subjects are often found in the reference collection.

Example:

A Bibliography of Islamic Economics (HB 126.4 .B516 1993)

Mathematical Models in International Relations: A Bibliography (Z 6461 .C48 1979)

Internet: A worldwide network of computers that allows the "sharing" or "networking" of information at remote sites from other academic institutions, research institutes, private companies, government agencies, and individuals. Understand that the Internet leads to some excellent information, but results need to be evaluated.

Example:

Outline of American Literature, Revised Ed.

Academy of American Poets

African American Women Writers in the 19th Century

Bartleby.com

American Verse Project
Writing tools: While writing a research paper, documenting the sources is very important. There are different styles of documentation. Ask your mentor which style of documentation to use.

Example:
MLA style, APA style, Chicago style, Turabian style
Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (BF 76.7 .P83 2001)

Other writing guides available in the library:
How to Write Research Papers (LB 1047.3 .S267 2002)

How to Read a Web Address
1. Do you recognize the domain name?

   The domain name is found after the http:// and www. to the first forward slash /. For example, in the URL www.harrypotter.com, harrypotter.com is the domain name.

   A domain name can sometimes provide clues about the quality of information of a site or tell you what a site is about.

2. What is the extension in the domain name?

   .com and .net are examples of extensions. Extensions are an important part of domain names. You probably know quite a few already. Extensions are intended to show the type of establishment that owns and publishes the domain. Here is a list to look for:
Extensions can also include country codes, such as .uk, .ca, .za, etc.

Some extensions may provide more reliable information than others, but there are no guarantees. Ones that may be more reliable are .edu, .gov, .k12. Ones to watch out for are .com, .org, .net. These domains can be purchased by anybody. This is not to say that sites with these extensions can never be trusted, but it is good to know whether you are on a commercial or special interest-type site if you are trying to access academic-type information.

3. Are you on a personal page?

You may or may not recognize the domain name or extension of a URL. Keep reading past the first forward slash / for more clues. If you are on a personal page the information you are reading may or may not be trustworthy.

A personal page is a web site created by an individual. The web site may contain useful information, links to important resources and helpful facts, but sometimes these pages offer highly biased opinions.

The presence of a name in the URL such as jdoe and a tilde ~ or % or the word users or people or members frequently means you are on a personal web site.

4. URL is an acronym for...

Uniform Resource Locator

5. Identify three Boolean search terms.

AND, OR, NOT

6. How do you find the owner or publisher of a Web site?

Go to www.easywhois.com and enter the URL of the site you would like to research.
7. Follow-up Activities for Teachers and Students:
   Have students find owner information for the site www.harrypotter.com

8. Identify these extensions and what they represent:
   
   .org - organization
   .com - company
   .sch – school (used outside of US)
   .k12 – most US school sites
   .edu – US higher ed
   .gov – US government (add country code for outside US)
   .ac – higher ed outside of US usually used with country code, example, “.ac.uk”
   .net - network
   .mil – US military
   .co – Company (if paired with a country code, example “.co.uk,” the state of Colorado or the country, Columbia)
Guide to Academic Sources

**Humanities**

*Primary sources* in literature and the fine arts are novels, poems, and plays as well as films, paintings, music, and sculpture. Your task is to examine, interpret, and evaluate these original works. Researchers in history must look at speeches, documents written by historic figures, and some government documents.

*Secondary sources* in the humanities are evaluations in journal articles and books, critical reviews, biographies, and history books.

*Field research* in the humanities comprises interviews with an artist or government official, letters, e-mail surveys, online discussion groups, and the archival study of manuscripts.

**Social Sciences**

*Primary sources* in education, political science, psychology, and other fields include speeches, writings by presidents and others, documents recorded in the *Congressional Record*, reports and statistics of government agencies and departments, and papers at your state's archival library.

*Field research* is most important in the social sciences and consists of case studies, findings from surveys and questionnaires, tests and test data, interviews, and observation. In business reports, field research consists of market testing, drawings and designs, industrial research, letters, and interviews.

*Secondary sources* include books and articles on social, political, and psychological issues, analyses and evaluations in journal articles, discussions of the business world in newspapers, magazines, and journals, and—in general—anything written about key personalities, events, products, and primary documents.

**Sciences**

*Primary sources* in the sciences consist of the words and theories of scientists discussing natural phenomena or offering their views on scientific issues, such as the words of Charles Darwin or Stephen Hawking. At the same time, journal articles that report on empirical research are considered primary material because they are original in their testing of a hypothesis.

*Secondary sources* in the sciences are not abundant. They appear generally as review articles that discuss testing and experiments by several scientists—for example, the review of four or five articles on gene mutation.

*Field research and laboratory testing* are crucial to the sciences and provide the results of experiments, discoveries, tests, and observations.

**Identifying the Best Source Materials**

Let's look at an inverted pyramid that shows you a progression from excellent sources to less reliable ones. The chart does not ask you to ignore or dismiss items at the bottom, such as magazines and e-mail discussion groups, but it lets you know when to feel confident and when to be on guard about the validity of the source.

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**Scholarly Book**

Scholarly books, including textbooks, treat academic topics with in-depth discussions and careful documentation of the evidence. A college library is a repository for scholarly books—technical and scientific works, doctoral dissertations, publications of the university...