

2. Why Information Literacy Matters

For resources to teach students about the role of information in contemporary life and the significance of information literacy, refer to:

- Video: Why Thinking Matters
- Video: Life in the Information Age
- Video: Data, Information, and Knowledge
- Video: Why Does Visual Literacy Matter?

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Sharing Information

How do students share findings? Research papers, social media, conversations, etc.? Do they understand their place in the larger world of information and progress? Brainstorm avenues of sharing or packaging information for others. What about ethics when it comes to information sharing, including both scholarly information and personal information in a digital environment? How does society factor into sharing information? Societal factors may be a worthwhile perspective when considering various countries' censorship issues.

What is Information Literacy?

Have students brainstorm the meaning of information literacy. This can take place as a classroom discussion or as small group discussions. Expanded discussion might include the definition/nature of information, how information is conveyed and used, and the definition of “literacy” in this instance. How do other forms of literacy contribute or relate to information literacy (such as visual literacy and digital literacy)?

Breaking Down Information Literacy Elements

Utilizing IL standards and/or threshold concepts, break down IL as steps or theories based on nature of class or student level. An example might be dividing IL into the following “steps”:

- Recognizing an information need
- Knowing where to look for information (how to look, resources available—library, Internet, people, etc.—what can they use?, why should they use these resources?, etc.)
- Evaluating information (including gray areas of information)
- Using information, ethics, and so on.

The dissecting of IL skills may depend on class time, student level, subject focus, or other factors.

The Nature of Information/What is Information?

Have students brainstorm ideas about the nature of information. Some discussion starters might include: information vs. knowledge, information vs. data, does information have to be factual to be considered information?, and how is information conveyed/transmitted? These questions lend themselves to discussions of printed information, images/art, body language, spoken language, etc. This may be a rich area to explore and can be used across a variety of disciplines.

Focus on Learning New Skills

Information literacy requires us to learn new skills and technologies in order to access and share information. What technologies have students encountered or would like to learn more about when it comes to access, evaluation, and sharing information?

Lifelong Learning

Discuss the following: "A broad term that encompasses the full spectrum of an individual's educational experiences from traditional school to other forms of learning, which may include non-formal, informal, and self-directed learning. The term is often used in connection with adult education in the higher-education setting. It also is used in the occupational and professional development setting. Lifelong learning refers to a lifelong commitment to continual learning and personal development and improvement."

Why/How are Information Literacy Skills Important in the Workplace?

Have students discuss ways in which IL skills could apply to their ideal jobs after graduation. Technology skills also factor into this discussion.

Discussion options: Develop a humorous list of made-up symptoms and have the students discuss IL skills as a process of discovery. If they have a set of symptoms, what is their information need? Where can they go for information? Where should they go for information? Are some sources of information better than others? Why? Are some sources gray—not necessarily wrong or right? How do they evaluate the information they find? How would they evaluate their doctor's diagnosis? Are there ethical implications of the information they've discovered? Should they use the newfound information to diagnose others with similar symptoms?

ACTIVITY

Information Log

Ask the student to record any piece of information he/she looked up (or wanted to look up) over the course of the day. Examples: What is being served at the cafeteria or café, how much something costs, when the next bus is scheduled to depart, or the due date of an assignment.

Alternatively, ask students to keep a log of questions asked by others. How do they respond to others' questions? How do they help others find information? These activities also can lead to research topics and discussions on the social nature of information. You can make concept maps in large or small groups.