1. Why is Information Literacy important?

We live in a globalised digital world where information proliferates, uncontrolled, diverse and commodified. Individuals accessing information must deal with more than abundance – questions of authenticity, accuracy, ethics, reliability and applicability pose challenges for the individual and society. Our University operates within this information-rich environment and has a commitment to empowering our students to participate effectively in it.

The need to acquire skills to translate information into knowledge is relevant to all disciplines. Information literacy is linked to professional competency and gives graduates skills which extend into all areas of life. The Graduate Attributes of USC acknowledge the importance of equipping students with transferable capabilities that are central to satisfying participation in contemporary society.

Students and academic staff generally underestimate the information literacy skills needed and overestimate the skills possessed (University of Leeds, 2003). Many students continue to rely on serendipitous internet searching rather than strategic and considered use of a range of information resources, not recognising the value of acquiring more sophisticated knowledge skills. Information literacy is an acquired skill to be learned, synthesised, practiced and applied.

Information literate people know how to learn. They are prepared for lifelong learning because they know how knowledge is organised, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them (American Library Association, 1989). They know how to verify or refute opinion and become expert seekers of truth (American Library Association,1989)

Individuals who are able to collect, understand and critically analyse information are empowered to become responsible participants in a democratic community.

Information literate people:

* recognise a need for information
* determine the extent of information needed
* access information efficiently
* critically evaluate information and its sources
* classify, store, manipulate and redraft information collected or generated
* incorporate selected information into their knowledge base
* use information effectively to learn, create new knowledge, solve problems and make decisions
* understand economic, legal, social, political and cultural issues in the use of information
* access and use information ethically and legally
* use information and knowledge for participative citizenship and social responsibility
* experience information literacy as part of independent learning and lifelong learning

2. Context

* [External context](http://www.usc.edu.au/library/about-the-library/information-literacy-strategy#excontext)
* [Internal context](http://www.usc.edu.au/library/about-the-library/information-literacy-strategy#intcontext)
* [Information Literacy and Learning and Teaching](http://www.usc.edu.au/library/about-the-library/information-literacy-strategy#landt)
* [Information Literacy and Graduate Attributes](http://www.usc.edu.au/library/about-the-library/information-literacy-strategy#graduate)

External context

The Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy (ANZIIL) has developed The Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework. Similar developments are being undertaken in the US and the UK. The second edition of the Framework, revised in 2004, presents six Information Literacy Standards. These standards are used to define the behaviours and learning outcomes for librarians and educators in teaching and assessing information literacy.

The six core standards identify an information literate person as one who:

* recognises the need for information and determines the nature and extent of the information needed;
* finds needed information effectively and efficiently;
* critically evaluates information and the information seeking process;
* manages information collected or generated;
* applies prior and new information to construct new concepts or create new understandings; and
* uses information with understanding and acknowledges cultural, ethical, economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information. (ANZIIL, 2004)

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## Information Literacy

The greatest challenge for society in the twenty-first century is keeping pace with the knowledge and technological expertise necessary for finding, applying, and evaluating information. It is acknowledged that we live in an information-rich society where the amount of information and knowledge in the world is presently doubling every two years ([Thornburg](http://library.queensu.ca/inforef/literacy.htm#thornburg), 1997) and will double every 12 or 18 months in the year 2,000 ([Breivik & Senn](http://library.queensu.ca/inforef/literacy.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22breivik), 1994, p. 7-8).

### What do we mean by "information literacy"

Most people think of information literacy as a set of skills requiring technical ability, or more simply, as "doing". True information literacy, however, involves both thinking and doing. Given the ever-expanding sea of information at our disposal, analysis of an information need, knowledge of resource types, evaluation of access tools, and interpretation of results are critical to successful information retrieval. We need to "know-how" but more importantly, we must first " know-why".

### What role does information literacy play in the learning process?

Information literacy is a means to express personal ideas, develop arguments, refute the opinions of others, learn new things, or simply identify the truth or factual evidence about a topic. It is acknowledged that most people are likely to change careers at least five times throughout their lives. The traditional focus on learning associated with a single vocation is past. People must become versatile learners who can adapt to new careers through their own ability of learning how to learn. Those who are not information literate are unable to make informed decisions given an information-related problem and must rely on others rather than thinking for themselves. Those who are information literate can analyse and interpret information and this ability enables them to respond critically and creatively to problems. Consequently, we can think of information literacy as contributing towards personal empowerment and our freedom to learn. When you know how to find and apply information you can teach yourself what you need to learn and essentially you have learned how to learn.

### What are the characteristics of the information literate?

Information literacy encompass skills but goes beyond location skills to concentrate on the bigger picture of information gathering. It stresses the basic concepts of how information is organized, the formats it comes in, and the structures used by different disciplines to record and transmit information. Knowledge of these broader ideas provides an information-literate user with a map of information structures. The map in turn represents the information landscape through which the researcher will navigate. Knowledge of the information search process and environment brings an awareness of the pitfalls and side roads that surface during information voyages.

Information-literate searchers are conscious of the research process as it takes place. They use metacognition to monitor each step or strategy they try and learn to revise a strategy when a barrier is encountered. Rather than concentrating on a single method for accessing information, theirs is a holistic view of information retrieval. For example, the student who only understands how to use the library book catalogue using keywords may be stifled when no matches are found. The student who understands how the catalogue classifies topics using subject headings, has a far better chance of success in an investigation. The student who also realizes that the catalogue is one of many starting points leading to particular resource types and that it may not always be the best place to begin depending on the topic, has additional insight into the search process.

Information literacy encompasses computer literacy. A computer-literate person can manipulate electronic information tools to gain access to information. Computers are part of the wider category of information tools and require their own special search methodologies. They are, however, just one of many information resources and should not be awarded greater value than other tools. They are efficient but in many investigations they are not suitable or even readily available. Information-literate people understand the role of computers in the search process. They are aware that computers are not thinking machines and that effective searches rely entirely upon the searcher himself. The adage "garbage in, garbage out" has been used to describe this phenomenon. A computer only retrieves what it has been asked to find, and if the terms it is searching are not useful or relevant to the task at hand, the results of the search are equally useless. In the 21st century, we are faced with an astonishing perception of electronic information retrieval: "garbage in, gospel out". There is a widely held belief by novice researchers that locating accurate and relevant information is only a matter of typing a word or two into a Web search tool.

### What are examples of information literacy objectives?

The acquisition of information literacy involves mastery of certain skills, the development of specific knowledge, and the adoption of certain attitudes.

#### Knowledge objectives

Students will understand:

1. The range of resources in various formats for information-finding purposes.
2. The selection of tools such as indexes available to access information.
3. The organization of information as it is represented in various access tools such as catalogues as well as its arrangement within specific disciplines.
4. The means by which information can be disseminated.
5. The publication sequence of information as it is transformed from idea to the published word in book format.

#### Skills objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Recognize an information need.
2. Design a research strategy that identifies the steps necessary to secure needed information.
3. Evaluate information and determine its relevance in relation to a given information need.
4. Use computerized information tools to locate information.
5. Summarize and analyze essential information from pertinent resources.

#### Attitudinal objectives

Students will appreciate that:

1. An information search takes time and requires persistence.
2. Self-confidence in finding information increases with practise.
3. The information search process is learned gradually over an extended period of time just as the content of any subject area is mastered.
4. Careful scrutiny of information-finding tools and resulting resources is essential to a successful search.
5. The information search process is an evolutionary process that transforms over the course of investigation as new information is acquired