

Incorporating Information Literacy into Oberlin's First Year Seminars

Faculty Guide

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Oberlin College Library
May 2002
[rev. May 2003]

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Introduction & Information Literacy Defined

One of the primary goals of the First-Year Seminar Program is to engage students in the critical thinking and research that are so important to liberal arts learning. Information literacy is essential to the successful realization of these core academic skills because, by definition, it refers to the set of abilities enabling one “to locate, evaluate and use effectively” relevant information. Taking a broader view, information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is essential to all fields of knowledge, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to increase their mastery of content by extending the sophistication of their investigations and allowing for more self-directed learning.*

The purpose of this guide is to provide faculty with practical suggestions and strategies for incorporating information literacy into First-Year Seminars.

Library reference staff have identified ten information literacy proficiencies that we believe to be crucial for Oberlin College students to master in their first year. Half of these proficiencies come under the “Scholarly Communication” rubric, and half under “Research Process.”

** definitions of IL adapted from Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, Association of College and Research Libraries —see Appendix II for full citation & link*

Information Literacy Proficiencies and Strategies for Addressing Them

Scholarly Communication

An information literate first year student is able to:

- 1. Understand that scholars and practicing professionals in their discipline generate, control, and use information (published/unpublished sources, electronic & personal communications, etc.) in very particular ways.**

Strategy: *make the invisible visible*; foreground your own process; talk about how/why you selected readings for the course: why were these particular articles selected? Highlight your own critical thinking process vis a vis assigned readings, suggested topics, your own research, etc. – things not usually apparent to students

Potential discussion topics:

- What's the current state of research in this field?
- What kinds of things are being written, discussed and presented?
- Where are they being published/presented [online? in print?], and why?
- How is information structured in this discipline?
- How are questions formulated and new ideas disseminated in the discipline?
- What kinds of information sources are used in the discipline (primary/secondary, scholarly/popular, etc)?
- What's the publishing culture in the discipline?
- Who are the publishers and what role do they play in the construction (not just production) of knowledge in the discipline?
- How do people access information in the discipline?
- How might research methods and contexts vary in different disciplines?

Potential exercise:

- Write a brief outline of the ways in which the ordering, production and dissemination of research might shape the development of new knowledge.

An information literate first year student is able to:

2. Understand that popular and scholarly material exists on most any topic; distinguish between these types of material, and determine when it's appropriate to use each type and why.

Strategy: *Consider the source and audience.* Work with students to help them understand why being able to distinguish between these types of material is important.

Potential discussion topics:

- How can you tell if a source is “scholarly” [i.e. peer review, institutional affiliation, etc.]. What visual cues are associated with scholarly sources?
- How can you tell if a source is popular [i.e. unsigned articles, flashy graphics, etc.]. What visual cues typify popular sources?
- If a source cannot clearly be identified as scholarly or popular (perhaps containing elements of each), how should it be considered in the research process?
- When might it be useful/necessary to use articles in popular or alternative sources?

Potential exercises:

- Have students identify and compare a scholarly article and a popular article that treat the same topic
- Give students several scholarly articles and ask them to identify the common features among the articles
- Provide students with a variety of resources (articles, Websites, etc.) and have them make arguments about whether, and why, they would classify each as being scholarly
- “Determining the Information You Need” lesson from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial: <http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/a3determine/>

Keep in mind: Students should be reminded that not everything is available on the Web; the current generation of college students may not be accustomed to or comfortable with using print sources.

An information literate first year student is able to:

3. Distinguish between primary and secondary resources in a given context and/or a given discipline; determine when it's appropriate to use these types of resources and why.

Strategy: *Consider the context.* Engage students in active thinking about what primary/secondary means in a given discipline, and why, in making these distinctions, "context is everything."

Potential discussion topics:

- What might be some general "rules" about what constitutes primary and secondary sources in different fields of study (biology, English literature, and politics, for example)?
- Why are the potential ambiguities and blurring of distinctions inherent in determining whether a source is primary or secondary dependent upon the question being asked, and when it's being posed (the time/date concept)?
- Ask students to consider a particular source (e.g. book, journal article, conference proceeding, Web site) and think about whether there are circumstances under which it might be considered a primary source, and other circumstances under which it might be considered a secondary source
- Have students consider various kinds of writing they have done [autobiographical/experiential, essays, research papers], and discuss whether these materials would be considered primary or secondary sources, and under what circumstances

Potential exercise:

- Give students several research questions/theses, and have them make a list of the kinds of primary resource materials scholars might seek in each case
- Have students evaluate a primary source; what was the purpose/intent of the source, who was its author/originator
- "Determining the Information You Need" lesson from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial: <http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/a3determine/>

An information literate first year student is able to:

4. Understand the nature of different types of publications, and why and when they are useful.

Strategy: *Explain format.* Examine the relationship/relative roles of different types of information sources.

Potential discussion topics:

- The general features of books and articles – what do they “do” differently, and what are the typical roles of each in the research process? [quicker publication cycle for articles, so timeliness/currency a factor; narrow focus of many journal articles, whereas books tend to take a broader “view”, etc.]
- How the roles of books, journal articles, and other types of publications differ in different disciplines/fields
- Trace the progression of an event/discovery/idea/theory from forms of publication in informal/popular sources to forms of publication in formal/scholarly sources (or vice versa)

Potential exercises:

- Have students compare and contrast treatment of a specific topic/question/issue in a book and in an article
- Have students identify a topic for which the majority of published information would be in article form [a recent trend or field of exploration for example]
- Tracking the flow of information; have students look at a given event/trend/theory, and track its evolution [relating to discussion topic 3, above]
- “The Flow of Information” lesson from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial: <http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/a1flow/>

An information literate first year student is able to:

5. Understand plagiarism and intellectual property issues (quoting, paraphrasing, attributing ideas).

Strategy: *An ounce of prevention.* Through discussion at various levels and at various points, help students understand the nature of intellectual property and related issues, such as plagiarism.

Potential discussion topics:

- The notion of common knowledge--how do you determine if an idea is common knowledge in the field (and therefore doesn't require attribution) or unique to an author?
- Mindfulness of these issues is more about ethical responsibility than pursuit of "original thought"
- Oberlin's honor code; what it's for, what it's intended to do, and how it addresses plagiarism
- How does research in an electronic environment, where so much "content" is available full-text online, impact issues of intellectual property?
- Recent high-profile cases in the media [Doris Kearns Goodwin, Stephen Ambrose, Kenneth Frampton]

Potential Exercises:

- Give students excerpts from books/articles, etc. and have them practice paraphrasing and quoting, and properly citing the material
- "Citing Your Research" lesson from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial: <http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/c4citing/>

Keep in mind: Two excellent ways to prevent unintentional plagiarism: require staged assignments with multiple drafts; and have students keep research logs

Research Process

An information literate first year student is able to:

6. Understand different types of bibliographic citations and be able to use a style manual to correctly document information sources in many different formats.

Strategy: *Map it out.* Outline the basic format of book and periodical citations and discuss the differences. Show how anthologies (or collected essays) are cited.

Strategy: *Make expectations clear.* Talk with students about preferred style manual for this discipline (APA, MLA, Turabian, etc.); require them to submit all citations in correct format - and tell them why it matters.

Potential discussion topics:

- Review citations on the syllabus, going over detailed components of given citations
- Distribute sample citations and “dissect” them so students will know which ones are for articles, books, essays, etc.

Potential Exercises:

- Provide citations from various bibliographies and databases. Have students label the parts of the citations and identify them (as periodical articles, books, collections of essays, government documents, etc.)
- Have students turn in citations in the proper format with early drafts of papers. Alternately, require a bibliography be turned in early in the semester with citations in the proper format.
- “Understanding Citations” lesson from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial: <http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/c1citations/>

Keep in mind: Modeling good citing behavior on your syllabus makes a difference; provide complete citations for all course materials, whether required textbooks, reserve readings, materials in coursepacks.

An information literate first year student is able to:

7. Formulate a research strategy, and understand the process through which questions are refined and redefined in the course of research.

Strategy: *Focus on process.* Help students understand that research is not generally a linear process, but one that can involve many trajectories – some meandering, some parallel, some “competing”, and some even unfruitful.

Potential discussion topics:

- Walk through the process of topic formulation, from general interest to statement of the research question/problem
- Share experiences where research was stymied, or blossomed, based on what was found while researching; dispel the myth that the perfect answer exists for every question, even the “obvious” ones

Potential Exercise:

- Have students keep logs on the ways their topic changes and evolves as they do research and encounter more information [allowing the option for a visual mapping of this process may be helpful for some students]
- Have students state the question/research problem and then consider what kinds of information sources will be needed to answer the question (i.e. primary/secondary sources, books, articles, videos, statistical sources, reference works, etc.)
- “Selecting and Refining Your Topic” lesson from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial: <http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/a2select/>

Keep in mind: Having students submit bibliographies at various stages of research process has multiple benefits: they can't procrastinate *too* much, they'll find out sooner rather than later how much material is available on a given topic, and they'll get used to keeping track of bibliographic data as they go along rather than scrambling to produce bibliographies at the end of the process.

An information literate first year student is able to:

8. Determine what resources/databases are appropriate to answer the question.

Strategy: *Teach tool savvy.* Make students aware of the existence of appropriate reference sources, databases, indexes, etc.

Potential discussion topics:

- Roles/uses of different types of sources throughout the research process [dictionaries/handbooks, OBIS, journal indexes, Web, etc.].
- Match a research question to the methods of scholarly communication in this field. Who would be interested in this question? Where and how would they communicate/publish? And which tools would you use to locate those publications/communications?

Potential Exercises:

- Have students state which resources they will use to find the kinds of information they said they needed; e.g. I will use OBIS, OhioLINK and Worldcat to find books and videos; I will use X and Y databases to find articles in scholarly journals
- Have students consult two reference sources to answer a particular question, and compare treatment of the topic in the 2 sources; have them note what else the tool could be used for
- Have students conduct a search for the same topic in 2 different databases and compare/contrast the results
- “Reference Sources”, “Library Catalog”, and “Research Databases” lessons from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial:
<http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/b3refsources/>
<http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/b1catalog/>
<http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/b2databases/>

An information literate first year student is able to:

9. Distill a complicated research question into searchable concepts/ keywords/ synonyms

Strategy: *Teach searching savvy.* Help students understand that they can't enter their thesis/topic sentence into a search engine and get a coherent result.

Potential discussion topics:

- Importance of being flexible when approaching different information sources
- Importance of identifying synonyms for a given topic/concept
- Research is a creative process!
- Importance of keeping a list of key terms/synonyms while investigating a topic; as new terms are learned research tools may need to be re-checked.

Potential Exercises:

- Have students “diagram” their research statement-pick out the most important key word(s), brainstorm synonyms and related concepts; will truncation be helpful? Boolean operators?
- Have students describe their topics in a few sentences then have them indicate what terms or search statements they will use in searching various sources (e.g. I will search OBIS with the key words blah and blah, and PsycINFO for the phrase blah de blah)
- Ask students to chart the changes in their thinking about the topic based on the results of their searching
- “Search Techniques” lesson from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial: <http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/b4techniques/>

An information literate first year student is able to:

10. Critically evaluate information for usefulness, bias, currency and authority (including Internet resources).

Strategy: *Resource evaluation as critical thinking.* Help students understand that any and all resources they encounter, regardless of format, should be judged and evaluated using particular criteria.

Potential discussion topics:

- Are there set criteria upon which sources in this field/discipline are evaluated/judged?
- Which are the most important criteria?
- Do the criteria vary depending on the type of source?

Potential exercises:

- Have small groups examine texts/Websites etc. and evaluate them according to agreed upon criteria
- “Evaluating Information” lesson from The Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial: <http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/c3evaluate/>

Sample list of Evaluation Criteria:

external factors:

- author’s credentials
- publisher’s credentials/reputation
- date/currency
- use of bibliographies, foot/end-notes

internal factors:

- evidence to back up assertions?
- clear & logical arguments?
- are all contributing factors considered?
- are all/most ramifications considered?

Appendix: Resources for Information Literacy and First Year Seminars

Information Literacy Standards

[to view documents referred to below go to <http://www.ala.org/ACRLTemplate.cfm?Section=ACRL> and click on the Standards and Guidelines button.]

Association of College and Research Libraries. Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. 2000.

Outlines five standards, twenty-two performance indicators, and a range of outcomes for assessing student progress toward information literacy. The standards focus on the needs of students in higher education at all levels and serve as guidelines for faculty, librarians, and others in developing methods for measuring student learning.

Association of College and Research Libraries. Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians. 2001.

Lists discrete and measurable goals for student learning; provides suggestions for generating ideas about teaching information literacy concepts and skills.

Information Literacy Tutorials

Five Colleges of Ohio Information Literacy Tutorial

<http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/infolit/>

A self-paced web tutorial designed primarily for liberal arts college students who are new to college-level research. Includes lessons on how information is created and organized, identifying information needs and resources, effective use of research databases and reference tools, creating citations, and evaluating information.

TILT (Texas Information Literacy Tutorial)

<http://tilt.lib.utsystem.edu/>

An interactive web tutorial created for undergraduates, focusing on fundamental research skills. Lessons cover how to select appropriate sources, search library databases and the Internet, and evaluate and cite information.

Other tutorials—compiled by LOEX, an educational clearinghouse for library instruction materials

<http://www.emich.edu/public/loex/islinks/tutlinks.htm>

This site lists over 50 additional Web tutorials, developed primarily by libraries around the US. Like the above two sites, most focus on general research and information

literacy skills; some concentrate on narrower areas, such as using the library catalog, searching for and evaluating information on the Internet, or how to use specific databases.

Resources for Teaching Information Literacy Concepts

Faculty Guide for Integrating Research and Information Literacy into Rhetoric and Composition Colloquia and First Year Seminars, Anne Trubek, Oberlin College
<http://www.denison.edu/ohio5/grant/development/trubek/facultyguide.htm>
Developed under the library's Mellon grant project, this extensive guide provides background, reviews goals for colloquia and seminars, and offers suggestions for developing courses, designing assignments, breaking larger assignments into manageable steps, working with students on Web research, collaborating with librarians, in-class workshops, and useful readings and resources.

Oberlin College Library. Preventing, Detecting & Dealing with Plagiarism, 2002.
<http://www.oberlin.edu/library/servninfo/reference/workshops/plagiarism/default.html>
Web site for the Winter Term faculty workshop; provides links to workshop materials, online resources for both students and faculty, and relevant readings.

Creating Effective Library Assignments, University of Maryland Libraries
<http://www.lib.umd.edu/UES/assignment.html>
Covers purpose and characteristics of effective library assignment, common pitfalls to avoid, and collaborating with librarians.

Tips for Effective Library Assignments, Steve Herro, St. Norbert College Library
<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Tips.html>
A variety of useful tips and suggestions adapted from an article originally written for a faculty development guide.

Thinking Critically about World Wide Web Resources, Esther Grassian, UCLA College Library
<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical/index.htm>
A useful overview for how to evaluate Web sites using various criteria such as content, currency, authority, and structure.

Library Support for First-Year Seminar Programs at Other Institutions

First Year Seminar Library Projects, Lafayette College
<http://ww2.lafayette.edu/~library/fys.html>
Lists ideas for projects and assignments, as well as tips for effective collaboration with library staff. Additional assignments aimed at introducing information literacy into upper level classes may also be helpful: <http://ww2.lafayette.edu/~library/infolit.html/>
First Year Seminar Library Component Goals, Wheaton College

<http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/Library/Reference/FYSgoals.html>

Outlines basic research skills to be taught and reinforced in FYS courses.

Tutt Library and the Research Component of the First Year Experience, Colorado College

<http://www.coloradocollege.edu/library/Course/General/FYEassign.html>

Provides suggestions for structuring assignments in ways that will engage students with library resources.

Using the Library in your FTS [First Term Seminar], Gustavus Adolphus College

<http://www.gac.edu/oncampus/academics/library/FTS/>

Offers general suggestions for working with the library, suggestions for assignments, examples of handouts, and sample library lab assignments.

First-Year Initiatives Program, Bowling Green State University Library

<http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/infosrv/libraryfyi/>

This program aims to work cooperatively with various first-year initiatives campus wide to introduce users to the library, reduce student anxiety about research, and promote the availability of helpful library services. The site offers a variety of handouts, lessons, exercises, and tutorials.

Suggested Readings

Brevik, Patricia Senn. *Student Learning in the Information Age*. Phoenix, AZ: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1998.

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Fister, Barbara. "Reintroducing Students to Good Research." 2001.

<http://www.gac.edu/~fister/LakeForest.html>

Gradowski, Gail, Loanne Snavely, and Paula Dempsey, eds. *Designs for Active Learning: A Sourcebook of Classroom Strategies for Information Education*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 1998.

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Jacobson, Trudi E. and Beth L. Mark. "Separating Wheat from Chaff: Helping First-Year Students Become Information Savvy." *JGE: The Journal of General Education*, 49:4 (2000): 256-280.

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Shapiro, Jeremy J. and Shelley K. Hughes. "Information Literacy as a Liberal Art: Enlightenment Proposals for a New Curriculum." *Educom Review* (March/April, 1996).

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This guide was written and compiled by the following members of
Oberlin College Library's Reference Work Group:
Kathy Abromeit, Cynthia Comer, Jessica Grim, Haipeng Li,
Megan Mitchell, Barbara Prior, Alison Ricker, and Heather Smith.
With thanks to Sandy Austin for production support.