Information Literacy: Essential Skills for 21st Century Learning

Introduction

Information literacy is “the knowledge, the attitudes, and the sum of the skills needed to know when and what information is needed; where and how to obtain that information; how to evaluate it critically and organise it once it is found; and how to use it in an ethical way” (International Federation of Library Associations & Institutions [IFLA], 2012).

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) defined several competencies for information literacy. According to ACRL (2000), the information literate individual will be able to:

• “determine the extent of information needed;
• access the needed information effectively and efficiently;
• evaluate information and its sources critically;
• incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base;
• use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and
• understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.”

As educators, we strive to provide students with the necessary skills to gather, evaluate, and synthesize information. Each segment of the student population has specific needs when it comes to information literacy. However, our particular interests focus upon the information literacy needs and skills of graduate teaching assistants (GAs). GAs find themselves in the unique position of being both students and leaders in the university classroom.

Drawing on content from a workshop on the foundations of teaching information literacy, this poster aims to provide instructors with a toolkit to teach these valuable skills. The content was covered in a three-hour practical workshop, but can be easily adapted for shorter sessions, and expanded upon for further exploration. While initially developed for GAs, these sessions have been adapted and offered to Ryerson faculty members.

Workshop Agenda

The workshop was broken down into various sections and exercises:

- Introduction
- Pre-test exercise
- Information literacy standards
- Activity 1: Finding information (library research skills)
- Activity 2: Evaluating information (internet searching)
- Activity 3: Using information ethically (academic integrity)
- Post-test exercise
- Conclusion/summary

Pre-test Exercise

In an effort to shift workshop participants out of their comfort zones, we devised a research question in which all participants would have a vested interest, but little prior knowledge. This research question was:

“Does the flu shot work?”

Exercises and Activities

After learning how to use Ryerson’s library resources to find and gather information, participants were asked to form small groups and develop a researchable question relating to the flu shot. Filling in the table below, they learned to think critically about effective search terms. They executed searches using library resources to find the best information sources for their research question.

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The second activity focused on evaluating information through the exploration of internet resources. The evaluation criteria provided below can be used for both print and digital resources. Participants were encouraged to ask some of the following questions:

- What did you find?
- How did you find it?
- Why did you choose this resource?
- What difficulties did you face?

Exercises and Activities (Continued)

The final information literacy standard requires the legal and ethical use of information. To demonstrate the importance of this standard in the context of higher education, workshop participants were provided with a document showing a sample text and multiple student attempts at paraphrasing. From there, participants were asked to identify which attempts constituted plagiarism and to explain their choices. As part of this discussion, workshop facilitators shared personal experiences about dealing with academic integrity issues.

Post-test Exercise

The summary activity asked participants to demonstrate their understanding of information literacy principles by investigating the following research question:

“Given the task of evaluating flu shot effectiveness and making the decision about whether or not to get the flu shot, search for information about the flu shot on the internet. Evaluate the information and websites you find. Finally, make an informed recommendation for a couple of information resources about the flu shot. Explain your choices.”

Feedback

In an informal survey, participants were asked to provide feedback on the workshop’s content and delivery. The image below captures some of the keywords in the comments about the workshop.

Selected References


Prepared by John Paul Foze, Don Kinder, Courtney Lundrigan, and Michelle Schwartz