# GUIDELINES ON INFORMATION LITERACY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING*

*Final draft*

By

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## Abstract

The International Guidelines on Information Literacy have been compiled by the Information Literacy Section (InfoLit) of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) with the aim of providing a pragmatic framework for those professionals who need or are interested in starting an information literacy program. The guidelines will aid information professionals engaged in educational programs, i.e., basic and higher education, in their efforts to meet their current information needs. However, most of the concepts, principles and procedures can be applied with minimal adaptation to any library setting. Information professionals working in all types of libraries should have as one of their main institutional goals the facilitation of users' efforts to acquire information competencies. Information skills are vital to the success of lifelong learning, employment, and daily interpersonal communication of any citizen, such as when a person needs information about health services for someone in his/her care, or a student requires specific information to complete an assessment.

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## Acknowledgments

# Introduction

Information competencies are a key factor in lifelong learning. They are the first step in achieving educational goals. The development of such competencies should take place throughout citizens' lives, especially during their educational years, where librarians, as a part of the learning community and, as experts in information management, have or should assume the key role of facilitating information literacy. Through the creation, with faculty, of curriculum-integrated programs, librarians should actively contribute to the students' learning processes in their search to enhance or develop the skills, knowledge and values needed to become lifelong learners.

These guidelines are a conceptual template to guide the creation of information literacy (IL) programs in academic and school libraries, although most of the principles can also be applied to public libraries. The document provides information to frame the IL efforts of educators, librarians and information facilitators at the international level, particularly in nations where IL is in the early stages of development. It is also of value to anyone who may need to start an IL program and would like a general conceptual framework, regardless of their geographical location.

Funding. The initial funding of the International Literacy Guidelines Project was provided by IFLA, the parent organization of the Information Literacy Section. Complementary funding was provided by the Universidad Veracruzana, and from the author responsible for the IL compilation project. The final step of translating and promoting these guidelines was completed with the generous funding of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Compilation. The principles, procedures, recommendations, and concepts listed in the document are a compilation from different international documents related to information literacy. Most of the content is based on published experiences generated by national library associations, as follows: the extensive work of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the seminal and early contributions of the American Association of School Libraries (AASL), the work done by the Big Blue project, the information skills problem-solving models of the Big Six expounded by Eisenberg and Berkowitz (1997), all from the United States, the contribution of the Society of College, National, and University Libraries (SCONUL) from the United Kingdom, the Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy and the contributions of the Mexican Information Literacy Forum.

Use of the guidelines. These Information Literacy Guidelines can be reviewed, changed or adapted by librarians according to their institutional needs so that IL elements can be better suited to local or national needs where local budget, policies, procedures, and priorities may be different. The only copyright requirement for any of this document is to cite it. The guidelines serve as a checklist during the planning and implementation of an IL program, or to reinforce previous information literacy work. Information professionals must keep in

mind that they need to do whatever they can with the resources that they may have.  It is better to do something than to wait for the crafting of the perfect information literacy program.

<u>Arrangement of guidelines</u>.  The document is divided into ten chapters that comprise the organizational spectrum of information literacy work, including a definition of concepts, a proposal for information literacy standards, a section on obtaining institutional commitment, the management of the learning process, including personnel development, educational theories, among other basic topics on how to implement the program, plus a list of key IL terms with their definitions, and a bibliography for further reading.  In most cases each topic is briefly introduced, followed by paragraphs with lists of bulleted points and a graphic summarizing the processes involved.  The writing style is simple and schematic for easy reading.
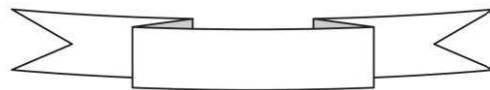
# Chapter 1

# Information Literacy Concepts

It is important to know the different concepts[1] that are related to information literacy to identify a clear direction for an information literacy program. This section contains a brief definition of relevant terms followed by the key concepts of information literacy[2].

<u>What is information?</u> Information is a resource that has varied definitions according to the format, and media used to package or transfer it, as well as the discipline that defines it. Case (2002) provides a broader definition. Here the term is synonymous with:
- Encapsulated knowledge
- Packaged human experience
- A source that can provide a myriad of data
- A resource that takes different formats, packaging, transfer media, and varied methods of delivery
- People: family, friends, tutors, fellow students
- Institutions, i.e., national health service professionals or help facilities

<u>The need for effective use of information.</u> Information has become a vital source for world economies and is certainly the basic component of education. Information is a vital element to technological and scientific change. It poses several challenges to individuals of all walks of life: students, workers, and citizens of all types. The current information overload requires people to validate and assess information to verify its reliability. Information by itself does not make people information literate. Information is certainly a:

- A vital element for creativity and innovation
- A basic resource for learning and human thought
- A key resource in creating more knowledgeable citizens
- A factor that enables citizens to achieve better results in their academic lives, with regard to health, and at work
- An important resource for national socio-economic development

<u>What is literacy?</u> The basic definition of literacy is "the condition of being literate" according to the Chambers English Dictionary (2003). This reference work, on the other hand, defines literate as "…learned; able to read and write; having a competence in or with" (p. 1856). In education parlance, "Basic Literacy" means the classic or traditional literacies of learning how to read, to write, and to perform numeric calculations and operations; basic literacies in almost all societies are learned in basic and secondary formal education

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[1] A search with the search engine "Scirus" asking "IL" and "concept" between 1994-2005 gives 1,765 journal results
[2] For more information, read: Bawden *(2001), and* Owusu-Ansah *(2003)*

settings, primarily public or private schools, but sometimes basic literacies are learned at home or in community centers.

Other "Literacy" concepts related to information literacy. Information literacy is linked with other types of related literacies, but it should be differentiated from them, especially from information technology, media literacy, network literacy, digital literacy, network or Internet literacy, "Computer Literacy" and "Media Literacy" (Bawden, 2001). These last two literacies are clearly defined by Horton (F. Horton, Jr., personal communication, December, 2004) in the following terms:

- Computer Literacy. The knowledge and skills necessary to understand information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the hardware, the software, systems, networks (both local area networks and the Internet), and all of the other components of computer and telecommunications systems.

- Media Literacy. The knowledge and skills necessary to understand all of the mediums and formats in which data, information and knowledge are created, stored, communicated, and presented, i.e., print newspapers and journals, magazines, radio, television broadcasts, cable, CD-ROM, DVD, mobile telephones, PDF text formats, and JPEG format for photos and graphics.

The information literacy concept. There are several definitions assumed by associations and authors. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a precursor in the IL field, and the Association for Educational Communications and Technologies state that "information literacy is - the ability to find and use information – is the keystone of lifelong learning" (Byerly/Brodie, 1999). Under the component of information literacy, AASL states that: "information literate student accesses information efficiently and effectively, evaluates information critically and competently, and uses information accurately and creatively" (Byerly/Brodie, 1999). Users "should have both information-gathering strategies and the critical thinking skills to select, discard, synthesize, and present information in new ways to solve real-life problems" (Byerly/Brodie, 1999). This information literacy definition extends beyond library skills and beyond the use of discrete skills and strategies to the ability to use complex information from a variety of sources to develop meaning or solve problems (Kuhlthau, as cited in Stripling, 1999).

A generally used definition. Attempts to define "Information Literacy" have been made for several years, mostly by librarians or professionals related to library science, and there are more similarities than dissimilarities in these definitions (Owusu-Ansah, 2003). The most commonly cited and used IL definition is the one adopted by the American Library Association (ALA), 1998: "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. The information literate individuals are those who have learned how to learn" (pp. 55-56). They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, know how to find information, and know how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them (Byerly/Brodie, 1999). "Whatever semantics we assume for the IL term, the ALA definition, itself, is broad enough to encompass the entire

spectrum of information skills; from Inuit traditional knowledge to high-tech search engines, and will probably be applicable for many decades" (Campbell, 2004).

Information competencies.  A competent citizen, whether a student, a professional or a worker is able to recognize her/his information needs, knows how to locate, identify access, retrieve, evaluate, organize, and use information.  To be an information literate person, one has to know how to benefit from the worlds of knowledge, and incorporate the experience of others into one's background.  The information literate person is capable, in Mackenzie's words, of:

- "Prospecting:
    The ability to locate relevant information, to sift it, to sort it, and to select it
- Interpreting:
    The ability to translate the data and information into knowledge, insight, and understanding
- Creating new ideas:
    Developing new insights"

Library actions that contribute to information literacy.  There are several terms that are part of or contribute to the information literacy (IL) concept.  They each have their own semantic content in addition to differences characterized by the type of skills, level, the categories of learning, and instructional facilitating methods.  Comprising many different concepts, IL has evolved beyond early library instruction and information skills-focused programs to the current concept of information literacy. While library instruction emphasizes the location of library materials, another IL concept focuses on information strategies, and in yet another concept, IL is used to describe the process of information-seeking and information use competencies.  To reiterate, information literacy focuses on information use rather than on bibliographic skills, that is, students must develop information competencies to become effective learners.  Some of the IL-related terms are (See Glossary for additional definitions):

- Information fluency – Capability or mastering of information competencies
- User education – Global approach to teach information access to users
- Library instruction – Focuses on library skills
- Bibliographic instruction – User training on information search and retrieval
- Information competencies – Compound skills and goals of information literacy
- Information skills – Focuses on information abilities
- Development of information skills – Process of facilitating information skills

Figure 1. The Concept of Information Literacy
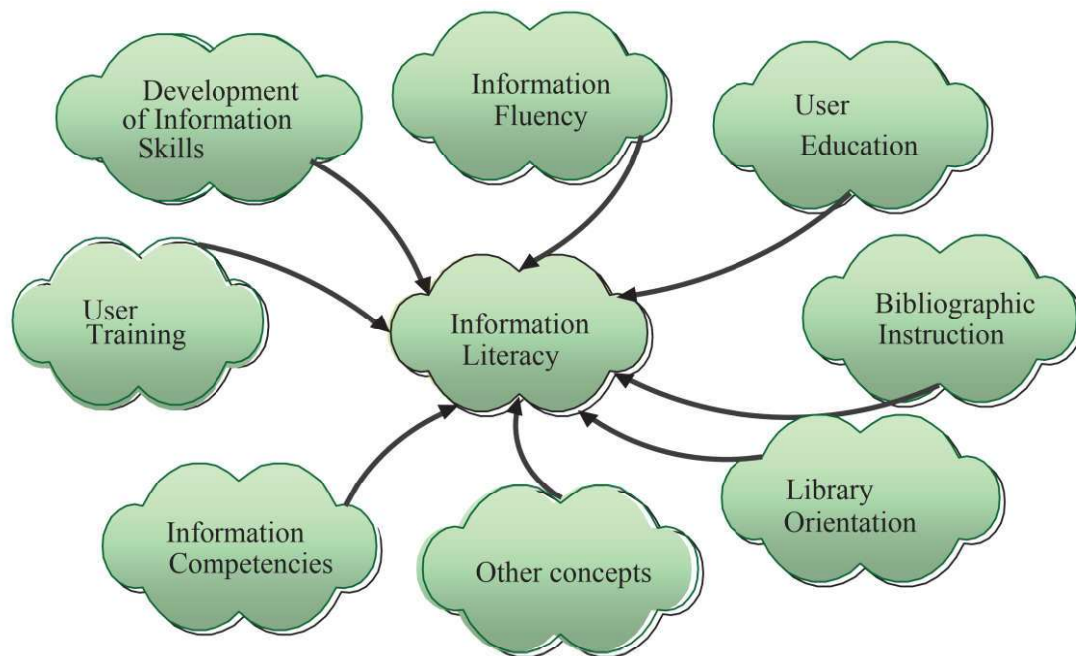


Constructivist approach. The library skills of locating and accessing information are not the same as the higher thinking competencies of knowing how to evaluate, interpret, and use information. Lifelong learning instructional methods and education theories have influenced information literacy instruction. A constructivist approach focuses on students engaging with information to solve a problem and thereby creating new understanding through active investigation and thought, instead of memorizing facts presented in class lectures. Such a pedagogical approach, where information literacy is needed, enables students to become qualified learners. Information literacy is or should be based, on the other hand, on resource-based-learning, information discovery, and inquiry- and problem-based-instruction. The fundamental issue is to attempt to become "pedagogically sophisticated" using a number of appropriate approaches to enable the intended learning outcomes to be realized, enable students to do the assessment and recognize as many learning styles and approaches as is realistically possible (Walton, 2004). This "triangulated" approach is mentioned by Bligh (1998, 5p.)

Translation of the term. The translation of the information literacy term from English into other languages is difficult, so information professionals from different countries should consider which words convey the right meaning to avoid semantic rejection by their learning communities. In Spanish, the IL literal translation is strongly related to the general concept of "Literacy." Teachers and faculty particularly dislike the term information literacy because of the correlation to the "rather" basic skills of reading and writing. The most commonly accepted term is "Desarrollo de habilidades informativas (DHI)" / Development of information skills, a definition that, instead of using a noun, stresses the IL process. A similar semantic challenge also occurs in the French language, and the choice

of a common expression is under process.  Most countries use literal translation of literacy, while others choose to stress "competency."

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