

# What is Information Literacy?

## What is information literacy and what does it mean to be information literate?

The American Library Association defines information literacy as a set of abilities empowering individuals to recognize when information is needed and to be able to locate it, evaluate it, and use it effectively.

While information literacy is often talked about in terms of doing library research for papers and annotated bibliographies and other sorts of classroom assignments, we use and need information in every aspect of our lives.

Your students have grown up with technology. They often use Google to answer all of their questions. But when faced with a college research assignment, many students do not know where to begin.

Some will figure it out on their own, while others may ask for help, but many will struggle without any additional guidance. This uncertainty about where to begin their research may lead students to fail, even to drop out.

Information literacy is an essential element of critical thinking and problem solving. Information literacy refers to the set of skills, practices, and knowledge encompassing: discovering and evaluating information; understanding how information is produced, valued, and circulated; and using information ethically.

Information literacy skills are important to every discipline and should be a part of the basic toolkit for student success. But when students lack these

necessary skills, there can be gaps between faculty expectations and student ability.

So what can faculty do?

These are some things you can do in your classroom to improve a student's information skills:

- Build research assignments that promote IL skills and support students through the process.
- Partner with your librarians to create dynamic information literacy assignments for your class.

Students with information literacy skills produce much more successful assignments—in turn, allowing you to spend more of your time and energy teaching, rather than addressing these critical thinking problems in each individual student. These students also tend to be more successful and demonstrate an increased perseverance in academic programs.