

Information Literacy
Stephen McVey
Notre Dame University, Fremantle, W.A.

At the recent ANZTLA Conference in July, Stephen McVey gave a PowerPoint presentation.

The artwork was so integral to his material that we have reproduced it just as it was presented on that occasion.

Ed.

Information Literacy



Assisting in the pursuit of knowledge

Image Credit: NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service

The problem ?



“Well, the worst images (of cyberspace) are of people who are overloaded with information which they don't know what to do with, have no sense of what is relevant and what is irrelevant, people who become information junkies.”

Neil Postman, Visions of cyberspace, 1995

A solution ?

‘Information literacy is an understanding and set of abilities enabling individuals to recognise when information is needed and have the capacity to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information’.

Source – CAUL Information Literacy Standards, 2001, pp 1.

Why is IL important?



- The proliferation of information and information platforms
- The decrease in the amount of information filtering
- The difficulty of discerning quality information
- Maximise the use of our assets – the library and librarians

An Information Literate student can:



- Identify the information necessary to solve the problem
- Find the information
- Evaluate the information
- Organise the information, and
- Define the nature and extent of their problem
- Synthesise the information into an answer.

How does IL differ from skills training ?

- IL instruction places an emphasis on what you do before you search
- IL instruction places an emphasis on what you do after you search
- IL instruction teaches generic skills which can be applied universally

Key IL strategies

1. accurately understand what it is you are looking for (so that you know it when you see it);
2. match your information need to a resource which will provide the kind of information you require;
3. critically evaluate what you find; and
4. manage your information carefully.

1. Accurately understand what it is you are looking for



THE RIVER FISHERIES OF THE ATLANTIC STATES.

Credit: NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service

Is this research ?

Investigate by
careful study



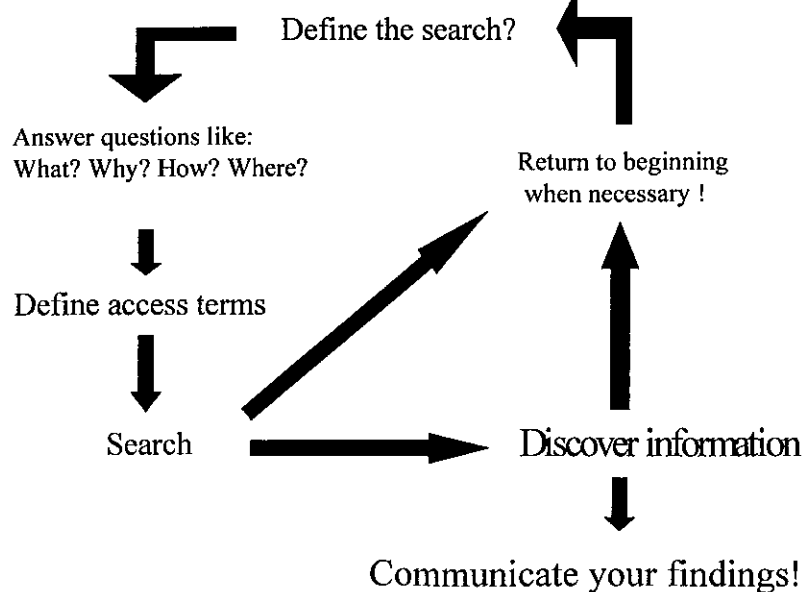
Research : 'The act of searching (closely or carefully) for or after a specific thing or person'.

The basic diagram ignores



- What researchers do before the searching begins, in order to decide what they are looking for.
- What they do during the searching, to ensure they can make good use of what they find.
- What they do after their discovery, in order to communicate what they have found.

This is research !



2. Match your information need



THE MENHADEN FISHERY.

Give us a look at the old style menhaden, throwing the parovine around a school of fish. (1914), vol. 1, pp. 294-295.
Examined by J. N. 2010

3. Critically evaluate what you find



THE MENHADEN FISHERY.

Credit: NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service

Choosing an 'Information package'



- What are the characteristics of various information packages ?
- How does the nature of the package help us in our search ?
- How is information structured ?
- How is information disseminated?
- What search tools should we use ?

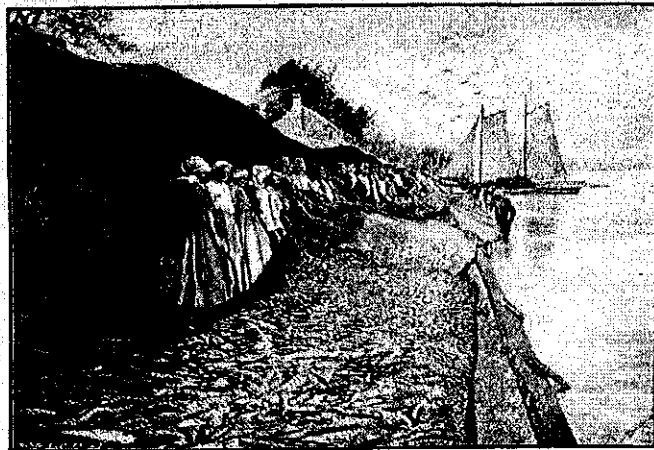
Evaluating information



Develop an evaluative framework
– ask questions of every
information package (can I trust
this source ?)

Learn to discern the markers of
quality information – understand
the packages and their
characteristics

4. Manage your information carefully



THE RIVER FISHERIES OF THE ATLANTIC STATES.
Produced by the National Marine Fisheries Service, Washington, D.C. in 1964. A large part of the work was done by the
National Geographic Society.

Credit: NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service

Managing Information



- It is essential to keep track of what is found
- Use index cards
- Or better still software such as EndNote
- Annotate the records for re-use later (LCSH Subject headings)

How do we do this in practice ?



Credit: NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service

Implementation



Integrate the instruction into a formal teaching programme

Small group instruction works best

Extend the teaching to staff—don't assume they know these things !

Do the teaching yourself—emphasise your expertise

Developing your learning materials



Why re-invent the wheel ?

Large volumes of teaching materials are freely available on the Web (e.g Loex, ACRL, ARL)

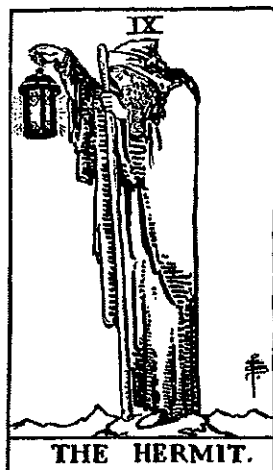
A package of UNDA materials can be sent via e-mail

The Implications of an IL programme



- **IL is an learning outcome: 'it doesn't have to do with the input, it has to do with what people can do *after* they have the input' (Breivik, p. 3)**
- **Students with these generic skills should be able to apply them to any research situation and any information platform**
- **The more students can do the deeper the questions they ask – this means more reference queries not less !**

A final thought



“The thrill of acquiring or distributing information quickly must not be confused with the more demanding task of converting it into knowledge and wisdom”

Alan Bundy, University Librarian, University of South Australia

Stephen is currently the Arts and Letters Liaison Librarian at the University of Notre Dame. His major function is information literacy instruction in the areas of arts and letters, and education.

Previously, he worked in the Law Library assisting in the delivery of an information literacy programme to the law and politics students.

Prior to working in libraries, Stephen was

involved in training staff for the Commonwealth Government, specifically in the area of information technology.

*Stephen McVey,
Liaison Librarian Arts & Letters,
Central Library,
The University of Notre Dame Australia.*

Fremantle WA 6959