

... the skills they are using are generic – they are transferable skills

Qualification in Information Handling Skills

A national qualification – **Information Handling Skills Intermediate 2⁴ (DF9J 11)** may be useful for practitioners who advise learners in relation to information literacy. This involves 40 hours of study, and the online Information Handling Skills material mentioned above can provide the required underpinning knowledge. The accompanying assessment has two parts to it:

- a practical ability assessment where the candidate has an information task to perform. The information task could be something the candidate is required to do for another qualification, eg, a piece of research. Their thoughts, actions and findings are all recorded in log books along with evidence to support their learning outcomes.
- a multiple choice questionnaire to test their knowledge and understanding

This SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) qualification can be undertaken at an SQA accredited centre.

References and further reading

Websites:

CILIP - A short introduction to information literacy
www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/informationliteracy/definition/introduction.htm

Learning and Teaching Scotland – Information Skills Exemplar Materials
http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/5to14/specialfocus/information_skills/resources.asp

Articles:

Armstrong, C. et. al. (2005). *Defining information literacy for the UK* [Online]. Available: www.cilip.org.uk/publications/updatemagazine/archive/archive2005/janfeb/armstrong.htm [2005, June 27].

Books:

Andretta, S. (2005). *Information literacy: a practitioner's guide*. Oxford: Chandos Publishing (Oxford) Limited.⁵

Webb, J., & C. Powis (2005). *Teaching Information Skills: theory and practice*. Oxford: Facet Publishing.⁶

¹ Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Information Literacy Group 2005 – information literacy definition <http://www.cilip.org.uk/professionalguidance/informationliteracy/definition>

² Information Handling Skills @ Slainte
www.slainte.org.uk/infohandling/index.htm
 This website contain information about the Information Handling Skills Material.

³ The Open University's Safari (Skills in Accessing, Finding, and Reviewing Information) material <http://ltssolweb1.open.ac.uk/safari/signpostframe.htm> was developed for their own students. This online interactive material has elements not contained within the Information Handling Skills material.

There are several universities that have information skills or information literacy materials on their websites. Although these have been developed by their librarians or learning centre staff, and are generally linked to the needs of the university, they are still useful resources.

⁴ Whilst the national unit specification is freely downloadable from SQA's website www.sqa.org.uk, the assessment instruments are in a secure area available only to SQA co-ordinators.

⁵ Book review www.ics.ltsn.ac.uk/books/reviewed/Information_Literacy.htm

⁶ Book review www.ics.ltsn.ac.uk/books/reviewed/Teaching_Information_Skills_theory_and_practice.htm

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Information Literacy - information skills for everyone

This article offers reminders and references for tutors to adopt or to explore in order to help all learners use information more effectively.



There is a common assumption that computer or IT (information technology) literacy equals Information Literacy. This assumption is particularly prevalent when talking about young people. Although they may be familiar with or competent users of IT this does not mean they are expert at finding or using information. The reverse could be said - that just because an individual is not very familiar or confident in using information technology then it doesn't mean that they have no information literacy skills.

So what is information literacy and what does it involve?

'Information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner.'¹

The above definition implies several skills and competencies required if an individual is to be information-literate. These are an understanding of:

- a need for information
- the resources available
- how to find information
- the need to evaluate results
- how to work with or exploit results
- ethics and responsibility of use
- how to communicate or share findings
- how to manage findings

We all have a need for information. The difference is in why we need it, the level of information we need and how we are going to use it. For example, at some point in our life we all need information about specific subjects related to study, employment, health, etc.

A common problem people have is that they do not spend enough time thinking about what it is they are looking for. They just dive in and then get frustrated when it takes them much longer than expected and they can't find anything relevant.

Before starting, learners should be advised to take time to:

- **think about what is already known about the topic and what exactly is being looked for**
- **draw up a plan of action - to identify where the best place to find the information is going to be and plan when and where the searching will be done**

Where to find information

A common assumption is that everything can be found on the Internet / Web so there is no need to bother looking anywhere else.

In today's society we are surrounded by information – everywhere we look and in everything we hear. It is presented in the form of words, images and sounds through the media of:

... just because an individual is not very familiar or confident in using information technology then it doesn't mean that they have no information literacy skills.



Although the web is a great place to find information, it does not contain everything and it is not always the best place to find the information being looked for

... acquiring and using information literacy skills is an iterative rather than a linear process

people

- friends, relatives, colleagues
- employers
- employees working in organisations – libraries, information centres, offices, shops etc.
- educators, eg, teachers, tutors, workshop presenters
- doctors, dentists, lawyers

print

- books, newspapers, magazines, journals etc.

electronic

- the Internet and the Web
- television, radio
- DVDs, CD-ROMs, videos, tapes etc.

Although the web is a great place to find information, it does not contain everything and it is not always the best place to find the information being looked for. Learners should therefore be advised to:

- learn about the web and the advantages and disadvantages of using it
- learn about the other types of **information resources available** and the **advantages and disadvantages** of using them
- explore the different types of information resources and then decide on the best resource to use for each piece of information needed

How to find information

People tend to think that search engines can do all the work for you - you just put in a couple of words and, hey presto, you get all the information you need. Life is seldom that straightforward! Learners should be encouraged to:

- **think about the words entered into a search engine – rubbish in, rubbish out. The words entered need to be keywords, words that are key to what information is sought**
- learn how to identify key words and to form a **search strategy**, not just for using with search engines but for all information searches
- remember to look at several different information sources not just the one source

The need to evaluate any information found

People generally think that if it is in the paper (newspaper) then it must be true. The same assumption is made about information on the web or on television. Again, it's not that simple, and learners should be advised to:

- not automatically accept all information as gospel
- check to see if it is relevant and understandable
- think about who has supplied the information and their reasons for doing so - **evaluate it**
- learn how to evaluate information for **credibility, accuracy, authenticity, bias and currency**
- not just take the first thing found - look further to search for something better, or that confirms or contradicts the first piece of information

How to use and communicate information ethically

So, the information found is just what is needed – often it is then copied or cut and pasted from the web, the user thinking that it is freely available for everyone to use as they want. **This is not acceptable usage.**

There are certain conventions that learners should be made aware of:

- when using someone's exact words – **quote them rather than steal their words (plagiarise)**
- how to **quote / reference** other people's work
- there are **different styles of writing** - use the one most **appropriate** for the **purpose and audience**, eg, emailing a friend about a possible holiday destination, writing a job application letter, an essay, a report for work, or an advertisement, etc.
- learn about the different styles and remember to learn about the **etiquette of emails**
- learn how to communicate information in a presentation

How to manage findings

One common mistake is finding information then not being able to find it again. This can be avoided by:

taking a note of where the information was found in the first place:

- if it is a web page then **bookmark** it or mark it as a **favourite** in a browser
- learn how to create a **bibliography**
- If these are unfamiliar terms then learn about them

having a filing system (manual or electronic) and using it

Conclusion

It is important to remember that acquiring and using information literacy skills is an iterative rather than a linear process. There will be occasions where a previous stage will need to be revisited as new information leads to:

- new sources of information
- or
- a reassessment of the information sources used
- new information needs
- or
- changes to the plan of action

This is part of the learning process and helps in the development of information literacy skills. Learners also need to recognise that the skills they are using are generic and that although they are using them for a particular topic or subject they can use these same skills for other topic or subjects – they are transferable skills.

Online learning material

The skills and competencies outlined in the above tips can be learnt / developed by accessing the 'Information Handling Skills'² interactive online material. This material is available to all branded learning centre learners through the learning bytes catalogue. Details about other available material that may be useful can be found at the end of this paper³.