

6 Big (and 38 Little) Information Literacy Questions: Getting Students Beyond Google and JSTOR

Carleton librarians work with students daily, helping teach them to become better researchers. This happens in different ways: in 06/07 we had over 1100 appointments, 2800 interactions at the desk, and 141 class sessions. As more assignments explicitly engage students' critical literacies and stretch across disciplines, we see an increased need to share our experiences about common difficulties students face. This is especially true as the faculty of Carleton think strategically about including information literacy in the curriculum for students -- as majors preparing for comps, as liberal arts graduates, as citizens and future leaders. In helping students develop their information literacy beyond a set of skills for using the library, we encourage students to ask the following questions of themselves during the research process.

The following list provides a sketch of what we mean when we say that information literacy, like other critical literacies, is a habit of mind.

- 1. Am I mindful that researching is a creative, intellectual and iterative process?**
 - Are there standard starting places (sources and finding aids and the like) and do I know what those might be? Do I know where I might look next?
 - After doing an initial search, do I know to step back and reflect on what I've found? "What have I learned?" "Do I need more?" "Do I need to synthesize?"
 - Do I plan for the need to go back and search at multiple points in the writing process: after conducting initial searches, reading some of the literature, and after beginning the writing process?
 - Will I know when to stop collecting information?
 - Do I realize that the inclusion and exclusion of sources in a bibliography is an intellectual choice?
 - Do I know that it's appropriate to consult with people who can help me (faculty, librarians, writing center, academic technologist, etc)?

- 2. Who makes up my community of inquiry?**
 - Which community am I currently addressing?
 - What methodologies resonate with and are appropriate to my community?
 - Am I familiar with the rhetorical tools of this methodology within this community?
 - What counts as evidence within this community and this methodology?
 - How am I building on existing work and have I acknowledged that relationship with proper attributions?
 - How is my project couched in the larger discussion within this community? How am I contributing to the discussion? Is mine an interesting question to the community?
 - What other communities may contribute to my understanding of this question?

- 3. Do I understand the rich array of paths I can take while exploring this question? What are all the ways I might want to address this question?**
 - Do I know what I'm looking for? Do I know where I'm going to look for it? Who might have disseminated it?
 - Do I know that published bibliographies or authors' lists of cited works, statistical compendia, disciplinary bibliographic databases, digital libraries, online portals, librarians' research guides, articles and books that I have on hand, and the free web can all point me toward formally and informally published scholarly work, primary sources (including primary data sources), government documents, and the like?
 - Can I use a citation index to find seminal works or to find works building on sources that I have on hand?
 - What are some of the indexes and other means to discover the literature in my areas of inquiry? Do I know where to look beyond JSTOR?
 - Do I understand the differences between these indexes and know how to choose which to use, to

what purpose, and how that will impact my search strategy?

- When searching on the free web, do I realize that the library may subscribe to restricted access items I find? Do I know to check the library's journals list to attain access to journal literature? (i.e., not getting stuck at the Sage Journals web site or paying \$40 for a working paper).
- Are there core sources in this field and have I tried using them?
- Are standard sources the most appropriate sources for this question? If not, what else might help me investigate this topic?
- Do I know to look (and how to look) beyond our library's collection when time permits and use interlibrary loan?
- How else might I use what I have already found to locate more?

4. Am I aware that the content I need may be in found in a variety of formats?

- Do I know about books, scholarly journals, newspapers, web-born publications, statistical compendia, government reports, dissertations, grey literature, video, audio, images, 2-D and 3-D art work, letters, memoirs, manuscripts, ephemera, public records, maps, special collections, microfilm collections, datasets, etc.?
- Do I realize that I may need to look in different places for these varied materials?
- Do I have a sense of the search strategies and terminologies I may need to employ when searching for different formats?
- Do I realize that how I evaluate what I find will be dependent upon its format and how I intend to use it?

5. Am I familiar with the core sources used within the discourse of this discipline?

- What are the trusted sources (associations, societies, organizations and particular publications) that produce the information I need and how is it disseminated?
- What are some of the standard journals and publishers and data sources?
- Who are the key theorists and researchers? What are the seminal works?
- Do I understand where my professor might expect me to look?
- Do I know which bibliographic styles are used in this discipline and the standards of attribution? Can I read and interpret information from citations as I encounter them?

6. Throughout the research process, am I thinking critically and reflectively?

- Could I ask a more interesting question? Or one that fits the assignment more closely (narrower, less time consuming, broader, taking advantage of local collections and access, etc.)?
- Looking at the sources I have, can I evaluate my overall strategy? Are my sources predominantly drawn from standard sources, obscure sources, sources not available at Carleton, sources from another discipline? What does this tell me about my research strategy?
- What can I learn by evaluating the results of a search? Is there terminology I'm missing? Are my search goals feasible?
- Can I look at a specific source and evaluate its relevance, usefulness, and authoritativeness?
- Am I able to distribute my attention to many different aspects of reading and evaluating searches? When looking at a list of search results, am I thinking ahead and focusing not just on what I am trying to find in this particular search but also being attentive to frequently appearing journals, methodologies, ways questions are framed and phrased, types of evidence, and common terminology? Am I able to weave my current search into my previous knowledge and future strategies?
- As I am writing, am I discovering that there is more information I need to go back and find, gaps to fill, and additional evidence to add?