

Introduction

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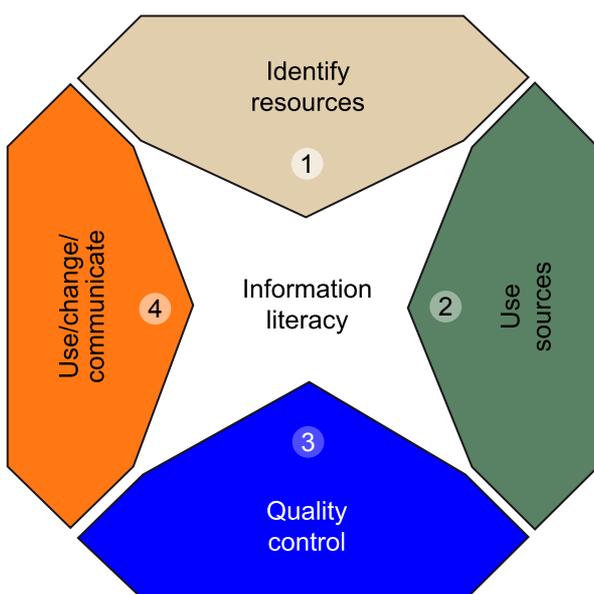
1. What are information skills?

Before we define the concept of *information skills*, we need to be aware of the fact that different expressions are often found in the literature available, including information skills, digital literacy or information literacy. Information literacy is a concept that was introduced in the 1970s and is now used as a matter of course to refer to skills associated with access to and management of information in the so-called knowledge society and in terms of the massive growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

What we call *information skills* can be defined according to the standards established by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL-ALA), in January 2000, as the set of abilities, attitudes and knowledge requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information".

In other words:

- Identify which types of information resources are the most suitable for each information need.
- Be able to use information sources.
- Exercise quality control when selecting the information: evaluate the appropriateness and relevance of the information selected.
- Use, change and communicate the information effectively with regard to a specific need and do so ethically.



In short, it is these skills that provide people with sufficient information autonomy to update and expand their knowledge, access information, use services and create new knowledge based on the information obtained. To summarise further, it is the ability of an individual to obtain the most relevant information to meet a specific information need.

2. Why is it important to master them?

One of the main objectives of the European process to establish a common structure for higher education (EHEA) is to provide people with the knowledge and strategies they will need for lifelong learning.

In short, it is a question of preparing students for lifelong learning, for learning how to learn. This requires new teaching models, far removed from traditional teaching based on the expositional transmission and accumulation of knowledge, and the adoption of new learning models based on putting knowledge into practice and acquiring skills, which, among other things, provide students with information autonomy; ie, those information skills detailed above in the standards drawn up by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL-ALA).

In the same vein, this teaching model also represents a challenge for teachers, who need to put into practice new teaching and learning methods that aid acquisition of these skills, skills that will become the key to the future success of graduates in the development of their professional career.

The aim of these materials is to give students and teachers useful tools to discover how to use different information sources and how to select the best sources for each need. They also offer practical ideas to help them know why, where and how to use each information source and how to make a critical assessment of the information that each one provides and use it well. In short, to provide basic knowledge to help them become skilled with information.

2.1. Beyond Google

"The good news is that everything is on the internet. The bad news is that everything is on the internet."

R. Wachbroit, University of Maryland

It is indisputable that the internet has become the main source of information in every sense and that the web provides us with increasingly wide access to a vast amount of information, in a way that we never had available before. Besides this, search engines such as Google have made searching for information on the web so very much easier and have made an exceptional contribution to its popularisation.

However, the generalised and intensive use of the internet, together with many other digital resources that are accessible from the web, has highlighted a number of problems, among others, from the point of view of the suitability or reliability of the information, as well as its ethical use.



As Robert Wachbroit's quote at the beginning of this section warns, there is a huge, huge amount of information on the internet, but with varying degrees of value. Accredited, high-ranking, supremely relevant scientific documents co-exist with pseudo-teaching and poorly regulated documents that have very little or no information value. This is why it is essential to push "beyond Google" and reach all the information that is invisible to general search engines. We need to remember, for example, that although it is true that the internet gives us free access to vast amounts of documentation, it is also true to say that a large part of the most valuable scientific information is still not free to access and we have to pay to do so. This is the case, for example, of scientific journals, which are essential if we are to keep up to speed with advances in the different fields of knowledge.

However, apart from the problem we have when accessing certain information that is not free to access, often the most valuable, we come up against the problem of "documentary noise", i.e., the amount of documents or registers retrieved during a search that are not relevant to the search topic, which normally occurs when a generic mass search or a not so accurate search is made using a general search engine. Therefore, we must also have the ability to know how to select and assess the most interesting information for each specific need.

Finally, as well as accessing, selecting and assessing the information, another important point we also need to bear in mind is the ability to organise and communicate it correctly, and use it in an ethical and legal manner.