

# INFORMATION LITERACY

## From Identifying Needs to Evaluating Sources

By Nancy Lane

Information may be one word in answer to a simple question, such as “What’s the weather like today?” Or it may be contained in a wide range of books, journals, and computer databases that help to provide answers to complex research questions, such as “What causes cancer?”

It is useful to think of information as part of a continuum: Data>Information>Knowledge>Understanding>Communication. *Data* are the facts and figures, based on observation,

surveys, or research that have been collected and are available for use.

*Information* consists of data that have been organized for the potential benefit of individuals. *Knowledge* is information that individuals recognize as relevant and think about and interpret, gaining *understanding*. They may also use this understanding for a purpose, which usually involves *communication*.

*Information literacy* is knowing when you need information, what you need, where to find it, and how to evaluate and organize it. The report

published in 1989 by the American Library Association’s Presidential Committee on Information Literacy ([www.ala.org/acrl/nili/ilit1st.html](http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/ilit1st.html)) stated that “teaching facts is a poor substitute for teaching people how to learn, i.e., giving them the skills to be able to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information for any given need.”

The American Association of School Librarians published a position statement in 1996 that outlined nine information literacy standards for student learning ([www.ala.org/aasl/ip\\_nine.html](http://www.ala.org/aasl/ip_nine.html)) (see sidebar). Pacific teachers should consider these standards and adapt them as appropriate to the print and media resources available through their school and through their local public and college libraries.

Although the Internet is becoming increasingly more important for research, students must be selective in deciding whether it is the best source for answering an information query. A printed source or a telephone call may be better, faster, and cheaper.

When the Internet is likely to be the best source, students must use a range of searching and evaluation skills to ensure that the information they retrieve is in fact authoritative, useful, and relevant. A website that provides links to a range of

criteria for evaluating the quality of website information is at [www.vuw.ac.nz/~agsmith/evaln/evaln.htm](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~agsmith/evaln/evaln.htm).

Unless students are taught critical thinking and evaluation skills with respect to information literacy, the fears of the Librarian of Congress, James Billington, may become real. As he wrote in “A Technological Flood Requires Human Navigators” (*American Libraries*, 27(6), 1996, p. 39), “I am haunted by the thought that all this miscellaneous, unsorted, unverified, constantly changing information on the Internet may inundate knowledge, may move us back down the evolutionary chain from knowledge to information, from information to raw data.”

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### INFORMATION POWER

#### The Nine Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning

##### Information Literacy

- Standard 1: The student who is information literate accesses information efficiently and effectively.
- Standard 2: The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.
- Standard 3: The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.

##### Independent Learning

- Standard 4: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and pursues information related to personal interests.
- Standard 5: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and appreciates literature and other creative expressions of information.
- Standard 6: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and strives for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation.

##### Social Responsibility

- Standard 7: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and recognizes the importance of information to a democratic society.
- Standard 8: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology.
- Standard 9: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and participates effectively in groups to pursue and generate information.

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▷ Students must be taught to evaluate Web sources carefully.