



The library
and information
association

CILIP Definition of Information Literacy 2018





Definition of Information Literacy

Information literacy is the ability to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use.

It empowers us as citizens to reach and express informed views and to engage fully with society.

Information literacy incorporates a set of skills and abilities which everyone needs to undertake information-related tasks; for instance, how to discover, access, interpret, analyse, manage, create, communicate, store and share information. But it is much more than that: it concerns the application of the competencies, attributes and confidence needed to make the best use of information and to interpret it judiciously. It incorporates critical thinking and awareness, and an understanding of both the ethical and political issues associated with using information.

Information literacy relates to information in all its forms: not just print, but also digital content, data, images and the spoken word. Information literacy is associated and overlaps with other literacies, including specifically digital literacy, academic literacy and media literacy. It is not a stand-alone concept, and is aligned with other areas of knowledge and understanding.

Information literacy helps to understand the ethical and legal issues associated with the use of information, including privacy, data protection, freedom of information, open access/open data and intellectual property. Importantly, information literacy is empowering, and is an important contributor to democratic, inclusive, participatory societies; as interpreted by UNESCO, it is a universal human right.



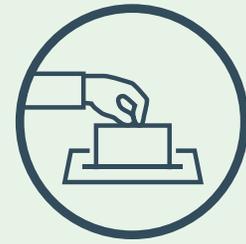
Information Literacy and Everyday life

Information Literacy may be deployed in everyday life without individuals knowing that they are making use of it – for instance, by checking hotel reviews on travel review websites or comparing insurance policy options. It is also about understanding the limitation of these online resources, how they may be subject to manipulation and the need to be discerning about their value.

In addition, information literacy is also relevant when conducting online transactions, with a need for awareness of internet security measures. Critical thinking skills are essential for avoiding online and phone scams and guarding against fraudulent transactions.

Information Literacy helps individuals to behave ethically in their online activities, allowing them to be mindful of the information they use and share about themselves and others on all types of online platforms, including social media.

This includes an understanding of the concept of a 'digital footprint', the traces that are left behind as individuals consume and create information. It provides people with strategies for managing their online identity and shaping it in a way they feel comfortable with, taking into account issues of privacy and personal safety of themselves, and others.



Information Literacy and Citizenship

IL allows individuals to acquire and develop their understanding of the world around them; to reach informed views; where appropriate, to challenge, credibly and in an informed way assumptions or orthodoxies (including one's own), and even authority; to recognise bias and misinformation; and thereby to be engaged citizens, able to play a full part in democratic life and society. Information literacy helps to address social exclusion, by providing disadvantaged or marginalised groups with the means of making sense of the world around them and participating in society.

In a global environment where 'fake news' has become a recognised term, an ability to display critical judgement about multiple information sources, particularly online, is crucial. Whether in relation to conventional news outlets, social media, internet searches or simply information communicated orally, information literacy helps to reach views about the reliability and authority of information sources. In these ways too, information literacy reinforces democracy and civic engagement. Information literacy, along with media literacy, underpins ethical journalism.



¹The International Baccalaureate is education for students from age 3 to 19, that focuses on teaching students to think critically and independently, and how to inquire with care and logic. It is taught in over 5000 schools in over 150 countries, including the UK. Further information is available at: <http://www.ibo.org/>

²This is a standalone qualification and is often taken by students to in addition to their A level studies. The EPQ helps students to develop and demonstrate their project management skills and provides opportunities for extended writing. Further information is available at: <https://qips.ucas.com/qip/extended-project-qualification-epq>

³ACRL (2016) Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education. Available at: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework> (Accessed 21 February 2018)



Information Literacy and Education

Information literacy applies to all stages of learning, formal and informal, covering schools (primary and secondary), further education (FE), higher education (HE) and, crucially, lifelong learning – information literacy does not cease with formal education.

Information literacy can enhance and enrich a range of taught subjects in the school curriculum, being embedded as part of critical thinking skills and knowledge development.

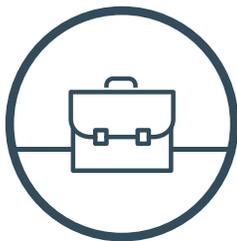
It has particular relevance for those students involved in enquiry-based learned learning such as those enrolled on the International Baccalaureate¹ and the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)² which is an extended piece of work on a topic chosen by the student and supervised by their teacher. Information literacy also helps students navigate the transition from school to further and higher education.

In Higher Education, information literacy contributes to academic competencies, research methodologies and an understanding of plagiarism. In common with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)³, we regard information literacy education as a series of ‘threshold concepts’ that allow students to discover new ways of thinking and new knowledge. Information literacy underpins transferable and employability skills, equipping students as part of lifelong learning. In formal educational environments, information literacy can be seen as the critical capacity to read between the lines.

It enables learners to engage in deep learning - perceiving relationships between important ideas, asking novel questions, and pursuing innovative lines of thought.

This active and critical way of learning encourages pupils and students to quickly master factual and descriptive elements of content (‘What’ and ‘How’) and then move on to investigate higher-level aspects such as source, degree of authority, possibility of bias, and what it means in the wider context. It is in line, for instance, with the English National Curriculum aim to equip students “to ask perceptive questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement.”⁴

Importantly, information literacy equips learners at every level with the intellectual strategies and tools such as adopting a questioning approach, not only to solve problems, but also to frame problems and situations in new and ground-breaking ways. This capability is crucial, beyond education, to meeting the expectations of the workplace.⁵



Information Literacy and the Workplace

In the workplace, information literacy is knowing when and how to use information in order to help achieve organisational aims, and to add value to organisational activities. This applies whatever the scale and location of the workplace, and whether the work environment is in the commercial, public or not-for-profit sector.

The exact nature of information literacy is highly dependent on the context of the workplace, and it reflects workplace culture, practices and experiences.

As such, it may manifest itself in a multitude of ways, reflecting the rich variety of environments to which it applies. Information Literacy helps to interpret work-related information, share it (within organisations and with external stakeholders, such as clients

or customers) and transform it into knowledge. Information Literacy means working ethically, understanding the implications of data protection, intellectual property rights, such as copyright.

Information Literacy also manifests itself both in terms of the information behaviour of individual workers and in the corporate policies, strategies and activities of organisations. It may be subsumed in other employment-related concepts such as knowledge & information management and data management. It also contributes to employability by underpinning attributes that are well-recognised by recruiters, such as teamworking, problem-solving and analytical skills.



Information Literacy and Health

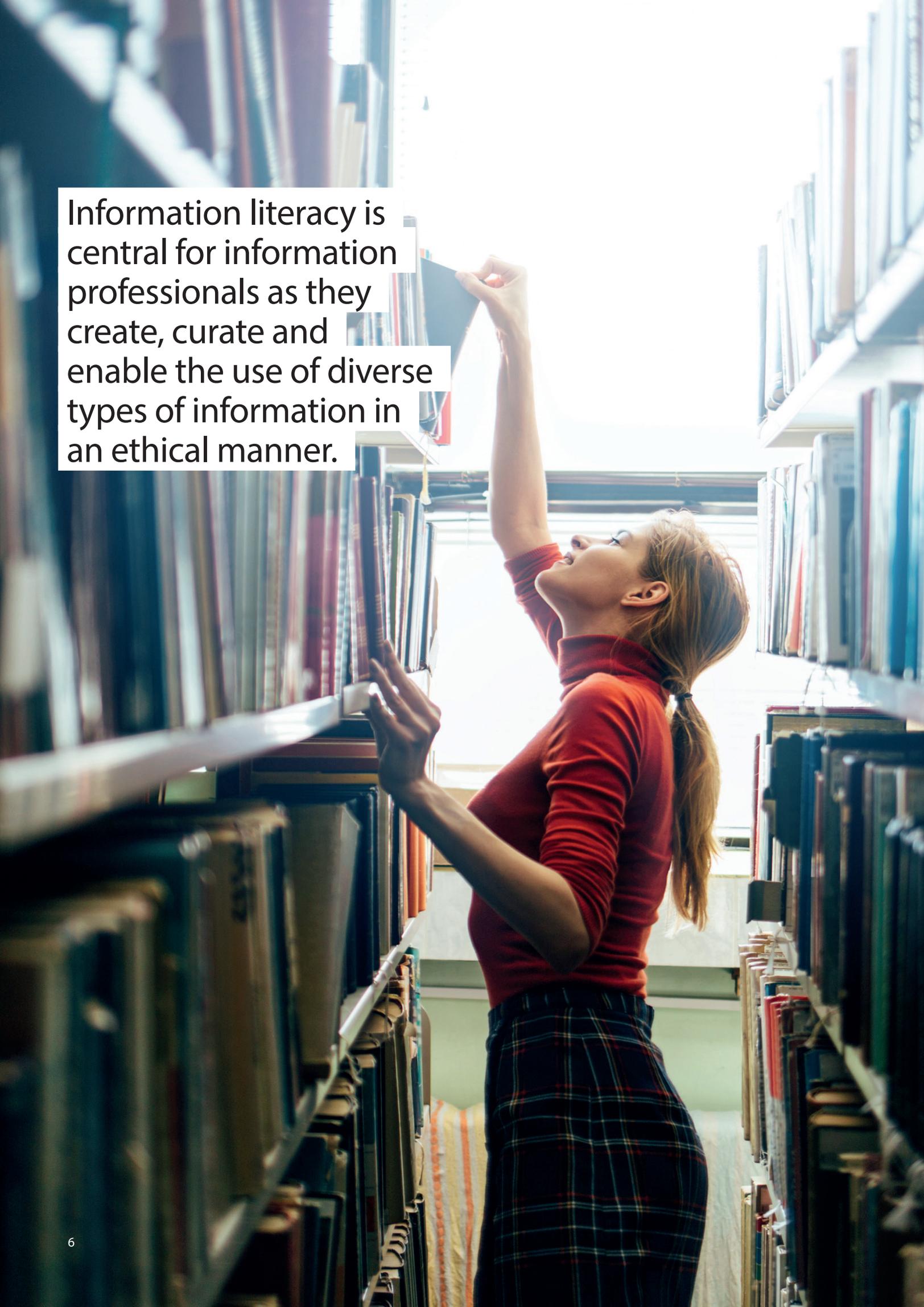
Information literacy, sometimes known in this sense as health literacy, helps make informed choices relating to the health and wellbeing of individuals and their families. Finding reliable sources of information for management of health conditions, preventative care and ageing is vital for individuals or their carers.

This implies using credible and reputable healthcare sources when looking for treatment and prognosis. To be an active partner in their healthcare, patients benefit from information literacy, allowing them to engage in an informed dialogue with healthcare professionals.

⁴ Department for Education (2013) National curriculum in England: history programmes of study. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study> (Accessed 21 February 2018)

⁵ Head, A. J. (2017) Posing the million-dollar question: What happens after graduation? *Journal of Information Literacy*, 11(1), pp.80-90. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/11.1>

Information literacy is central for information professionals as they create, curate and enable the use of diverse types of information in an ethical manner.



The role of information professionals

Information professionals have a crucial role in advocating, supporting and enabling information literacy. This may be most evident in educational contexts where academic librarians teach student cohorts or school librarians support enquiry-based learning or research project methodologies. Public librarians support the everyday life uses of information literacy, in both formal and informal settings and have perhaps one of the greatest responsibilities in supporting the wide range of information literacy needs of the general public. Information professionals in health including health librarians have a key role in delivering and interpreting information and evidence to clinicians, and ensuring medical staff, patients and the public have access to accurate, life-changing information.

Information literacy is central for information professionals as they create, curate and enable the use of diverse types of information in an ethical manner.

Other professionals, such as teachers, academic advisors and educational technologists also foster information literacy and it is key that information professionals work with them in collaboration.

Training and support for information professionals in information literacy is provided through a variety of routes, including but not limited to:

- Library Masters qualifications
- Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy
- Attending training provided by the CILIP Information Literacy Group, including LILAC
- Resources available from the Information Literacy website
- Professional reading
- Peer support
- Other sources of professional training

Background

The CILIP Information Literacy Group have created this definition⁶ for information literacy to update the definition devised by CILIP in 2004. The theory and practice of information literacy has evolved considerably since then, and the new definition reflects these developments, notably by addressing the relevance of information literacy beyond formal education. The new definition is also addressed to multiple audiences, potentially to anyone who uses and handles information, and not just to information professionals.

The UNESCO Alexandria Proclamation inspired some of the thinking behind this work, as did the updated ACRL Framework for Information Literacy and A New Curriculum for Information Literacy (ANCIL).⁷

“IL empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion in all nations.”

UNESCO (2005) Alexandria Proclamation.

How was it devised?

In June 2016, the ILG Committee launched a consultation of ILG members.⁸ Respondents provided useful insights in the way that the task might be approached. Further comments were solicited in August-September from Committee members themselves and then additional feedback was obtained at the LILAC Conference in April 2017. The outcome of these consultations is a suggested frame and scope for an extended definition is set out below. The definition was completed in August 2017 and approved at the ILG Committee meeting on 1st September 2017. The CILIP Board approved the definition in November 2017.

April 2018

Authors in alphabetical order

Emma Coonan,
Anglia Ruskin University
Jacqueline Geekie,
Aberdeenshire Libraries
Stéphane Goldstein,
InformAll
Lisa Jeskins,
Lisa Jeskins Training
Rosie Jones,
The Open University
Rowena Macrae-Gibson,
Brunel University London
Jane Secker,
City, University of London
Geoff Walton,
Manchester Metropolitan University

⁶ The current definition and supporting statement can be found at <http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/advocacy-campaigns-awards/advocacy-campaigns/information-literacy/information-literacy> (Accessed 21 February 2018)

⁷ Secker, J and Coonan, E. (2011) A New Curriculum for Information Literacy (ANCIL). Available at: <https://newcurriculum.wordpress.com> (Accessed 21 February 2018)

⁸ ILG memberships currently stands at about 1,500 members.



Join CILIP and be part of your profession
www.cilip.org.uk/join



Find out more and become a ILG member:
Email: cilipilg@gmail.com
Twitter: [@infolitgroup](https://twitter.com/infolitgroup)
www.informationliteracy.org.uk