Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

Research Competencies in Writing and Literature

Association of College and Research Libraries
Literatures in English Section

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Contents

Introduction

Purpose of the Framework Companion

In accordance with the formal adoption of the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* in 2017, the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) Literatures in English Section (LES) seeks to provide guidelines for helping librarians collaborate with faculty, students, and researchers in creating new literary scholarship and creative works through navigating and engaging with texts and scholarship. The aim of this document is to provide librarians:

1) concepts for improving information literacy for novice and expert learners of writing and literature,

2) tools to help create learning objectives for information literacy instruction in these same areas, and

3) ways to align their teaching practices with the *ACRL Framework*.

These concepts and tools are structured to mirror the *ACRL Framework*, so librarians will find knowledge practices and dispositions for learners of writing and literature underneath corresponding threshold concepts. As stated in the *ACRL Framework,* "*knowledge practices*...are demonstrations of ways in which learners can increase their understanding of these information literacy concepts, and *dispositions*...describe ways in which to address the affective, attitudinal, or valuing dimension of learning." Knowledge practices help with developing assessable outcomes, and dispositions are developed over time, and come with mastering a threshold concept. This Framework companion recognizes that not all learners will be at the same level in every classroom setting. Novice, intermediate, and expert learners will make progress toward certain concepts at different times and with different abilities, and the following learning objectives recognize that. For librarians consulting this document, be aware that each disposition or knowledge practice can be tailored to consider the various learning stages.

Audience

While the primary audience for this document are academic writing and literature librarians, educators in the discipline of writing and literature, in addition to academic librarians from other disciplines, are also stakeholders. For those outside the writing and literature discipline, use this document as a complement to your own subject-specific companion document in order to align your teaching practices with the *ACRL Framework.*

In line with the [LES Anti-Racist Action Plan](#) to better integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into

the section's overall practice, this document is intended to be open, usable, and living. We welcome a diversity of voices and reflections about this document and encourage feedback via this linked form: [Feedback for the Research Competencies in Writing and Literature Companion Document to the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*](#).

Timeline of the Revision

The original *Research Competency Guidelines for Literatures in English* were implemented in October 2004 and revised in January 2007. In 2016, the ACRL Literatures in English Section formed a working group to revise the *Guidelines* to align with the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. Members of the working group reviewed literature related to information literacy in English and related disciplines -- such as journalism, creative writing, digital humanities, and writing and rhetoric -- and gathered disciplinary guidelines and standards to prepare for writing a draft. In 2018, the working group wrote a draft of the new document and sought reviewers in libraries and disciplinary departments to read and comment on the document. In 2019, the working group sought feedback on the document from the LES membership, taking their ideas and suggestions into consideration and making subsequent revisions in 2021.

Contributing Members of the Working Group to Update the Research Competencies in Writing and Literature Framework

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Literary Scholarship

As with many disciplines, literary research involves a conversation between one person (e.g. an author, scholar, student, etc.) and a host of other people (e.g. publications, scholars, peers, etc.) across time and space about a "text" or ideas relating to that text. Traditionally, "text" has been defined as a work or body of written literature, but it has come to mean anything that can be analyzed and interpreted in a similar fashion (e.g. visual and/or digital media, historical documents, formal or informal publications, etc.). By engaging in conversation with others about the text's meaning, literary research seeks to create new meanings from these texts. In subsequent references to "text" or "texts" in this document, we are referring to both the object of analyzation (e.g. novel, poem, image, media, etc.) and the product of that analysis (e.g. literary scholarship, analysis arguments, close readings, digital edition, etc.).

In order for these conversations to take place, scholars need to have an understanding of the breadth and depth of research necessary before, during, and after this conversation. Part of this research is thinking through the approach to the text that a scholar will be taking because different approaches to theory and interpretation will require different tools and methods, and/or modes of reading and writing. Additionally, literary scholarship often takes place in a hybrid ecosystem, in which students and scholars are expected to work within print and digital media. They are also expected to gather sources from a variety of authors, dates, and publications, and they are increasingly expected to interact with scholarship and research methods from other disciplines. And with the emergence of new areas, such as digital humanities, many literary scholars are required to manage large amounts of data.

Those embarking on this research -- whether as a novice in an introduction to composition class, an intermediate in a creative writing course, or an expert in an upper-level seminar -- have the potential to create new knowledge not only through their own original ideas, but also by engaging with tools and resources available in a growing number of hosts, platforms, formats, and even disciplines. There are an increasingly

number of ways to access pieces of these conversations; thus, it is important for librarians and instructors to assist undergraduate and graduate students, and for librarians to help other faculty and scholars at large, in understanding, locating, and engaging with the various ways in which the discipline of English Studies continues to ordain and encourage this research.

Assessment

Assessment can help librarians and instructors understand the extent to which students are able to develop these knowledge practices and dispositions. Assessment strategies and designs will vary according to factors such as the type of instruction offered (e.g. full-credit course, one-shot session, embedded, online module, etc.), student academic status (first year, undergraduate, graduate, etc.), as well as other variables. Examples of assessments contributed by teaching librarians can be found within the ACRL Sandbox and Project CORA.

Works Consulted

Foasberg, Nancy M. "Teaching Citation Rhetorically: Reading, Not Just Writing." College Composition and Communication Conference, 2017. CUNY Academic Works. academicworks.cuny.edu/qc_pubs/158/.

"Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," American Library Association, 2015. www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

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Research Competencies in Writing and Literature Framework

Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

While traditional forms of scholarship (e.g. scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, etc.) are still widely considered to be authoritative among literary learners and instructors, emerging and less traditional information resources (e.g. online publications and digital projects, scholarly blogs, social media, etc.) have an impact on the creation of new knowledge. Constructing authority in literary scholarship has traditionally relied on recognizing the resource's reputation somehow -- be it the publisher, author, editor, or institution, or authority as a creative practitioner -- and it continues to do so. However, authority of literary resources also relies on the context of the scholar's research question, and the question can enhance the authoritativeness of those emerging and less traditional information resources. Novice learners will easily recognize authority by relying on resources approved by their instructors, and expert learners will begin to rely on other avenues as they discover who and what constitutes "authority" in their research area.

Knowledge Practices:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Use a literary critic's formal writings to provide a pool of references and their less formal writings to access the scholarly conversations on the topic;
- Differentiate among primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, and realize that each of them establishes authority within the context and development of the research question;
- Identify types of resources (e.g. dissertations, book reviews, review articles, peer-reviewed publications, etc.) that lend additional authority to their own arguments. Each of these sources may use different strategies to establish its own authority, depending on its genre and context, and each type of source plays a different role in establishing the authority of the author who quotes or cites it;
- Contextualize the research question using a multitude of formats (including, but not limited to scholarly monographs and book articles) that speak to a multitude of audiences;
- Use information resources such as professionally established databases (e.g. *MLA International Bibliography*), "grey literature" (e.g. preprint material in institutional repositories, an individual's resume or online profile), and less traditional publications (e.g. posts on social media, content on a website, the result of a digital humanities project, etc.) to gather information within appropriate contexts;
- Incorporate multiple points of view as evidence to create and establish their own authority;
- Differentiate between the purposes and scholarly weights of different editions (e.g. revised, critical, festschrift, etc.); and
- Use rhetorical strategies to consistently examine the processes by which they choose and evaluate scholarship, and how those processes might be shaped by individual or cultural systems.

Dispositions:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:

- Develop and maintain an open mind when encountering varied and sometimes conflicting perspectives;
- Recognize how genre conventions (e.g. citation styles, tone, and medium) shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes, and employ those conventions within their own writing;
- Recognize that certain conventions (e.g. formal and informal rules of content, organization, style, evidence, citation, mechanics, usage, register, and dialect) establish some level of credibility within a discipline;
- Understand that some markers within a citation (e.g. domain name, author, publisher, journal name, etc.) carry more weight than others for certain audiences; Within this, learners will also understand how publishers and presses often serve as markers of the authority related to source content (e.g. university presses, popular and trade publication houses, independent publishers, open-friendly publishers, etc.);
- Develop awareness of the importance of assessing content with a critical stance and with a self-awareness of their own biases and worldview; and
- Value social interactions with scholarly communities as a way to build authority.

Information Creation as a Process

As the discipline of English Studies concerns itself with the interpretation of texts, the context and processes by which information is created are important in understanding literary scholarship, creative works, digital projects, and other primary sources. Literary scholarship produces many types of resources, including monographs, book chapters, journal articles, dissertations, and websites. At the same time, the texts that are the subject of scholarship may also be broadly construed, including prose, drama, poetry, and film, or newer literary products. Most of these resources undergo some kind of peer review process; however, the specifics may vary among formats. With the emergence of new areas, such as digital humanities, scholars are using new methodologies and creating digital resources and tools unlike traditional scholarship. These projects are often more collaborative than traditional literary scholarship and undergo a very different publication process. Literary research may also include the use of sources such as interviews, social media, and historical primary documents in order to put literary works into a useful context. The key to interpreting and accessing literary texts and scholarly works depends on understanding how they are created and published. Novice learners may focus on information creation through close readings, and if they seek out secondary texts to support their argument, they may primarily use those that are clearly identified as scholarly or peer-reviewed, and might not engage with primary or historical documents. Expert learners will understand the purpose of using peer-reviewed sources and will evaluate scholarly and non-scholarly sources with consideration of the processes used to create them. Expert learners will also understand the advantages of collaboration and the peer review process as they create their own arguments, interpretations, and creative works.

Knowledge Practices:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Articulate the benefits and limitations of the peer review system;
- Distinguish among various types of secondary sources, including book chapters and journal articles, by looking at the citation, skimming the source itself, or recognizing where they found it (e.g. if they found a description of the source in an index);
- Differentiate between primary sources that are original works and also contemporaneous texts;
- Use primary sources and scholarly secondary sources appropriately in their scholarly and creative writing endeavors;

- Select appropriate editions to consult in the process of their scholarly work, with the understanding that a critical edition of a primary work could be more useful than another edition;
- Access literary scholarship in print and online, both through library databases and via open access sources;
- Recognize emerging methodologies, including digital humanities methodologies, and identify the kinds of work they make possible; and
- Recognize how the accessibility of texts and publication formats can influence who uses the materials.

Dispositions:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Understand the structure of information and modes of production/publication within the field of literary research;
- Value the characteristics of literary works (i.e. primary sources) that indicate the nuances of their authorship, production, and dissemination in their historical context;
- Seek out the characteristics of literary scholarship (i.e. secondary sources) that indicate their methodologies, theoretical lenses, and publication processes;
- Acknowledge the value of different types of scholarly resources, including journal articles and book chapters, as well as less traditional sources, like social media and blog posts;
- Are critically engaged with the variety of formats and modes through which literary scholarship is developed;
- Accept that the differences between primary and secondary sources are often contingent upon the context in which they are being referenced; and
- Recognize that the formats and resources available for developing and publishing literary scholarship are rapidly expanding, in addition to being increasingly open and collaborative.

Information Has Value

Though literary scholarship is often discussed as the consumption of resources and the implications of how to consume responsibly, novices and experts in writing and literature should also understand author rights as information creators and make informed decisions regarding the potential publication, preservation, distribution, and, in some cases, monetary value of their creative and scholarly works. Some literary practices, such as anthologizing and canonizing, can intentionally or unintentionally marginalize authors, literary texts, and scholars. The means to create, publish, and preserve primary and secondary sources, and the structures that mediate access to such content, impact the ability to study or create literature. Thus, it is important to critically examine the structures of power that often privilege the written word and published texts over oral traditions or digital outputs. Novice learners will understand citation practices as a way to acknowledge the accomplishments of others, synthesize the literature, and to connect one's own creative or scholarly output to previously produced work. Experts will recognize that cultural, economic, historical, and legal factors frequently construct information's perceived value, and critically engage with such factors in order to produce new scholarship.

Knowledge Practices:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Cite and appropriately synthesize information from primary and secondary sources, including those that appear in traditional formats (e.g. monograph, scholarly journal article, etc.) and in less traditional formats (e.g. scholarly blog, user-generated content, digital exhibit, etc.);
- Articulate the purpose and distinguishing characteristics of copyright, fair use, open access, and the public domain, and engage with material in each category;
- Determine when, why, and how to identify information from a variety of scholars (including traditionally underrepresented, marginalized, international, etc.), publishers (including university presses, independent presses, etc.), and organizations (including non-for profit, literary foundations, etc.);
- Review scholarly bibliographies, conferences, course descriptions, etc. to understand how scholarly conversations value, devalue, or exclude academic or artistic contributions;
- Seek out anthologies, bibliographies, oral traditions, or crowd-sourced tools to understand the complexities of "canon formation" and be critical of scholarly practices that are exclusionary; and
- Discern the variety of licenses and publication formats (e.g. print, digital, multimodal, preprints, open access, etc.) that are available to make one's intellectual and creative work accessible to a broader public.

Dispositions:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Value the skills, time, and effort needed to produce literary works, digital projects, scholarship, and knowledge;
- See themselves as creators of scholarly and creative output who have the ability and knowledge to decide how to best distribute, preserve, and represent their work;
- Examine their own information privilege or lack thereof, and critically evaluate the conditions that either provide or limit access to information;
- Recognize that the copyright status of information (e.g. subject to copyright, public domain, or fair use, etc.) often determines whether or not a researcher or author can use that information to create new scholarship or creative work;
- Discern how book history and publishing practices influence and inform literary analysis and literary writing;
- Understand that the date of publication influences the meaning and use of a creative or scholarly work, and therefore should be taken into account when using for scholarly purposes (e.g. interpreting the work, formulating the research question, etc.);
- Recognize different modes of literary analysis and understand that their relevance or appropriateness can change over time;
- Acknowledge that archives, collections, and repositories require ongoing resources to preserve materials and make them accessible; and that these materials are shaped by the selection and mediation of individuals (e.g. collectors, archivists, publishers, etc.), potentially impacting their availability;
- Acknowledge literature's capacity to create and resist exclusionary structures;
- Recognize that issues such as language barriers, printing history, translation, and non-compliance with accessibility standards can affect access to information sources; and

- Understand that intellectual property is a legal and social construct that varies by culture and historical context, and often privileges the published text over oral traditions

Research as Inquiry

Research in writing and literature is a process-based exploration of a text that centers interpretive meaning-making through the acts of reading, interpretation of texts through theoretical lenses, and interrogations of the text itself. Reading, research, and meaning-making in literary research are deeply tied to an iterative process of inquiry; they produce discursive analysis, critical inquiry, and conversations across communities of readers. Research also shifts original questioning and expands into further inquiry and interpretation, sometimes as a result of realizing limitations or discovering new possible avenues. Furthermore, writing, digital scholarship, and literary research are increasingly interdisciplinary endeavors that contextualize historical, social, and/or cultural meanings. Learners in writing and literature begin to hone their methods of investigation by learning to situate themselves as readers who are aware of the perspectives that they bring to a text. Typically, novice learners will have a line of inquiry or interpretation based on general ideas that are not necessarily grounded in existing conversations or publications, and they may not have a concrete plan or method for how to answer those inquiries. Expert learners usually form a research question based on knowledge of a body of work or evidentiary claim, and are able to plan ahead to answer that question through resources and people who provide research services.

Knowledge Practices:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Perform critical readings and analyses of literary scholarship on an author, genre, or discipline;
- Pose research questions that are appropriate in scope and method, relevant to a scholarly audience, and based in textual evidence;
- Address layers of interpretation and context, and can interpret readings with complexity, moving beyond a binary analysis;
- Uncover implicit bias in a literary canon, incorporating historical, social, and cultural disciplines that highlight identities and the intersections of marginalized voices;
- Notice voices absent from narratives, look for unspoken and missing meanings, and analyze context and genre both in terms of presence as well as absence;
- Use information not explicitly related to a particular text in order to put that text into the context of its genre or historical period or race, class, and/or gender (e.g. exploring scholarship from other disciplines);
- Use information sources for distinct purposes and identify different modes of narrative and style corresponding to a variety of audiences and readers;
- Use a variety of source types, formats, authors, and genres for one line of inquiry so that the representation of sources is equitable, diverse, and inclusive;
- Analyze both the structural and the symbolic meanings possible for interpretation in a text;
- Outline or illustrate their research process and communicate their reasoning when evaluating their choice of information sources;
- Employ digital humanities methods and tools when appropriate, and interpret and analyze texts across multimodal formats; and

- Utilize emerging technologies, methodologies, or digital tools to analyze existing literature and scholarship or to produce new scholarship or creative works when appropriate.

Dispositions:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Realize that texts hold multiple forms of interpretation and meaning-making and exist within multiple contexts;
- Read scholarship and other texts with a continually critical view, and continually develop questions throughout the process of resource gathering;
- Recognize the inherently difficult process of developing a line of inquiry, and develop ways to address the emotional labor of research;
- Address ambiguities and engage with multiple and diverse voices, moving beyond a binary oppositional rhetoric;
- Ask questions of one's own research practices (e.g. research questions, sources, process, scope, etc.);
- Understand that question-asking is an iterative process; and
- Recognize one's own perspective while reading and interpreting a text, and recognize the expertise and lived experiences of others.

Scholarship as Conversation

Scholarly and research conversations in writing and literature disciplines center around the interpretation and analysis of texts via close and distant reading combined with the application of theoretical lenses, prior debates, archival material, other disciplinary approaches, and, increasingly, digital tools. There is no one single methodological approach to or definitive interpretation of a text: meaning-making is an individual practice as different readers bring different perspectives to bear on their analyses of a given text. At the same time, meaning-making is a discursive practice that evolves over time, contextualizing historical, linguistic, social, or cultural perspectives, excluding some voices and privileging others. The variety of critical perspectives points to not only the interdisciplinary nature of the field, but also an emerging, collaborative one. Experts actively seek out a variety of critical perspectives from various venues (e.g. professionally established databases, scholarly book reviews, citations, etc.) and trace the threads of discourse surrounding a text so as to identify relevant entry points for engaging in the conversation. Novice learners may take longer to recognize distinct perspectives of the whole conversation. Both novice learners and experts participate in the conversation by making informed choices about where and when to participate. Experts use both traditional and less traditional avenues for engaging and sharing (e.g. presentations at conferences, articles in scholarly journals, drafts in a repository, posts on social media, content on a website, etc.). Novice learners might participate in sharing their scholarship within the context of a peer review assignment, in an online discussion group, or as part of a class presentation. Above all, both novice and expert learners use and document the sources of their research using established disciplinary conventions, linking their interpretation to the broader scholarly conversation.

Knowledge Practices:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Contribute to scholarly conversations at an appropriate level, such as classroom discussion, online forum/community (e.g. Goodreads/Amazon, Wikipedia entry, social media, etc.), undergraduate research journal, conference presentation, poster session, etc.;
- Appropriately cite primary and secondary sources of all formats, using the conventions of an appropriate style guide, such as the *MLA Handbook*;
- Critically evaluate others' contributions by questioning what the writer is responding to, noting which citations are used, and recognizing where the conversation is taking place (e.g. journal article, book chapter, marginalia, book review, blog post, crowdsourced project, social media, etc.);
- Analyze scholarly bibliographies, dissertations, conferences, course descriptions, information visualizations, etc. to recognize how scholarly conversations evolve over time, while sometimes privileging certain voices and information over others; and
- Turn to relevant reference resources (e.g. guides to literary theory and criticism, encyclopedias of poetry, dictionaries of literary terms, etc.) for guidance in acquiring, defining, and using the vocabulary necessary to enter the scholarly conversation.

Dispositions:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- See themselves as contributors to scholarship rather than only consumers of it;
- Consider carefully whether, when, and where to enter the scholarly conversation;
- Recognize that the critical and theoretical landscape (e.g. critics, schools, movements, periods, critical innovations, etc.) is diverse, global, increasingly interdisciplinary, and, sometimes, steeped in competing histories, thus providing multiple approaches, perspectives, and modes of inquiry;
- Appreciate that interpretations of and debates on literary texts evolve over time as new voices enter the scholarly conversation;
- Recognize that the contemporary language used to describe literary scholarship can change over time, and requires attention to differences in vocabulary (e.g. controlled vocabulary in a database, synonymous keywords in a search, etc.);
- Seek perspectives from outside of language and literary disciplines when necessary, looking to relevant fields (e.g. film studies, media studies, disability studies, gender studies, etc.);
- Recognize that with the emergence of new areas, such as digital humanities, evolving methodologies and tools will help promote new forms of literary scholarship that is more collaborative and interdisciplinary;
- Understand that barriers to accessing a variety of texts (e.g. paywalls, gatekeeping, university affiliation, etc.) may affect the scholarly conversation or exclude voices from it; and
- Observe that certain conventions are expected by different audiences when entering into an ongoing scholarly conversation (e.g. formal and informal rules of content, organization, style, evidence, citation, mechanics, usage, register, dialect, etc.), acknowledging how these expectations are shaped by historical, cultural, and societal norms, biases, and/or prejudices.

Searching as Strategic Exploration

Research in writing and literature begins as most research does: with a question. Encompassing inquiry, discovery, and serendipity, research in writing and literature includes identifying both possible relevant sources and the means to access those sources. Expert learners realize that information searching is a culturally and historically contextualized experience with several steps, influenced by the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of the researcher. Novice learners tend to use simple or fewer search strategies, relying on things like the title of the work and the name of the author, while experts often employ various search strategies, depending on the sources, scope, and context of the information needed. Developing an explicit search strategy or project plan with clear goals is itself a sign of competency as a researcher. Furthermore, novice learners may search a limited set of resources (e.g. referring to faculty reading lists, using readily available library or internet resources, etc.), while experts may search more broadly and deeply, (e.g. searching for primary source collections, reading experts' blogs, browsing relevant call number ranges, etc.) to determine themost appropriate information for their project.

Knowledge Practices:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Design a search strategy and timeline that recognizes the scope of the project (e.g. research for a 3-5 page class assignment requires a different search strategy than research for a peer-reviewed journal article);
- Consult varied resources based on the perceived canonical status of the author and the lenses used to analyze the work(s);
- Identify scholars, theorists, professional organizations, and publishers who are engaged in related studies across a variety of information platforms;
- Match information needs and search strategies to appropriate search tools (e.g. subject-specific databases, open access tools, reference works, digital or physical primary source collections, repositories, bibliographies of related works, etc.);
- Identify relevant search language based on historical (e.g. changes in terminology over time), cultural (e.g. using vernacular language as appropriate), technological (e.g. transcription or OCR errors), and disciplinary contexts (e.g. selecting synonyms for interdisciplinary concepts);
- Identify broader, narrower, and related terms appropriately beyond the author and title searches (e.g. using genre terms or subject headings to identify sources);
- Manage searches by using advanced database features (e.g. saved search history and search alerts), keep track of both previous search strategies and newly-available scholarly information, and manage search results (e.g. engage citation management software) to organize resources; and
- Seek guidance from experts, such as librarians, researchers, and scholars in the appropriate field(s);

Dispositions:

Learners of writing and literature who are developing their information literate abilities:
- Understand that first attempts at searching do not always produce adequate results;
- Exhibit mental flexibility and creativity, pivoting search strategies when necessary;
- Realize that information sources vary greatly in content and format, and that they have varying relevance and value, depending on the needs and nature of the search and the analysis the researcher is doing;

- Understand the scope, hierarchies, and entry points of databases and other information repositories in order to access relevant information;
- Recognize how structures of information and classification may contain inherent prejudices (e.g. how historical subject terms include language that is no longer accepted);
- Understand how scholars create, present, publish, and disseminate work in the humanities, and utilize this understanding to create effective search strategies;
- Recognize the value of browsing and other serendipitous methods of information gathering; and
- Persist in the face of search challenges, and know when they have enough information to complete the information task.

For Further Reading

ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox. sandbox.acrl.org/.

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