How Information Works

This summarizes the document, ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. Summary below by Sherri Saines.

Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

- Who we trust as an expert depends on why we need the information & who’s doing the trusting.
- Authority exists because a community gives it to someone. Beware: sometimes authority comes mostly from “privilege” that can drown out other voices.
- Good thinkers consider information skeptically, but keep an open mind.
- An expert can use any medium to communicate their ideas. Information is increasingly built socially, and formats will continue to change.

Information Creation is a Process

- The way information is shared changes the way it is created, and vice versa.
- Good information can come in any format. Every format has its benefits and drawbacks, including assumptions about quality and authority that may or may not be true.
- Formats are changing fast, and researchers have to keep up with how these new formats work so they can understand the information that comes out of them.

Information Has Value

- Information is worth money. It can be bought and sold.
- It is valuable because seekers learn from it & use it to influence others.
- Economic, legal, and social forces influence how it is created, used, packaged & traded.

Research is Inquiry

- Research is seldom a straight line with an answer at the end. It is a spiral of deeper questions that arise as understanding grows.
- The more a researcher works, the more skill and perspective they gain about the process itself.
How Information Works (continued)

Scholarship is a Conversation

- Researchers talk to one another, even across the centuries, gathering new ideas into old questions. The interplay creates new things.
- There may be many answers to a single question.
- A researcher may have to earn the right / learn the rules to speak in a given conversation, depending on who / what is already “in the room.” It might not be fair.
- When someone adds a new idea, they must say whose ideas they gathered to get that far.

Searching is Strategic Exploration

- Searching is a skill set: search mechanics matter.
- The mental flexibility to ask a question in many different ways of many different kinds of sources — and learn as you go — is also necessary.
- Who you are affects how you search. Learn to stretch.
- Searching can get convoluted; stay organized.

In both actions and attitudes, and for each of these ideas separately, a researcher moves along a continuum from novice to expert. Their path to Expert Information User is just as convoluted and recursive as the research they are doing.

For example, one aspect of Information Has Value might be stated this way:

Novice information users underestimate the time and skill that goes into creating a product; they see themselves as consumers. Experts see themselves as producers, and value the work & time it takes.

Visit ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework for the full document this summary is based on.