

## “Writing Information Literacy” at USU

The following summarizes a discussion between Utah State University librarians and English writing instructors serving as Information Literacy Fellows during Summer 2005. The group was asked to brainstorm the question: “What does writing information literacy look like?” Two articles by Rolf Norgaard<sup>1</sup> provided the springboard for the discussion by calling for librarians and composition instructors to think more theoretically about the relationship between information literacy and composition.

### 1. What does “Writing Information Literacy” look like?

- Inquiry: writing and information literacy are both dependent on asking good questions throughout the entire process
- Iteration: writing and information literacy are both recursive processes that require reflection and revision, not just of the formal features of a paper (e.g. grammar). Writing and information literacy require students to reflect on their changing knowledge and understanding of ideas and concepts.
- Ambiguity and dissonance: Writing and information literacy require students to reflect on ambiguity and conflicting ideas. Indeed, both should build on dissonance as a fruitful avenue for learning.
- Analysis: Writing and information literacy require analytical processes, such as taking an idea apart and putting it back together in new ways.
- Context: Writing and information literacy require an understanding of the context of knowledge creation, including how knowledge is produced and disseminated in academic disciplines. Students should understand that they are part of a broader communicative and knowledge creating practice.

### 2. What are the gaps between current student behavior and our vision of “Writing Information Literacy?”

- Persistence: it is easy to stop at the first answers you find, especially when those answers, whether in Google or a library database, are so voluminous.
- Evaluation: rather than evaluating only web sources for their credibility, students need to reflect more on the relevance, quality, context, and usefulness of the information they find. They need to be evaluative in a much broader sense by continually checking their understanding of what they find with what they already know and with what others know.

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<sup>1</sup> Norgaard, R. (2003). Writing information literacy: Contributions to a concept. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 43(2), 124; Norgaard, R. (2004). Writing information literacy in the classroom: Pedagogical enactments and implications. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 43(3), 220.

- Flexibility and creativity: Students need to be more flexible and creative in their approaches to research, rather than using the same strategies to answer all questions.
- Asking good questions: Students often think of research and writing about a “topic” rather than asking component questions that will help them develop new ideas and understandings. Questions formulation and revision is a central feature of good research and writing.
- Integration and synthesis: Students have a tendency to simply summarize discrete pieces of information, rather than making connections and creating a larger whole.
- Develop own voice: This is related to students’ tendency to summarize, rather than synthesize. It is also related to student expectations of what an “academic paper” is. In both cases, students need to understand their role as participants in academic and social discourse.

### 3. What are our larger goals and issues related to those goals?

- We must begin with where students are and build on their existing knowledge and habits, whether it be searching Google, gaming, etc.
- Motivation for both students and English instructors: both groups have certain expectations about writing and information literacy which might make it difficult to motivate them to participate in a new curriculum and approach.
- We need to demonstrate the value of information literacy and writing to students.
- We need to reward the messiness inherent in a more inquiry-based approach.