

4 Things to Consider When Teaching Digital Literacy to College Students

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Consuming information online is as simple as a click, scroll, or swipe these days. All searches are not created equal — and rarely do we think about fact checking what we find on the internet.

“...The **internet is actually changing the way we read, the way we reason, and even the way we *think***, and all for the worse,” says Tom Nichols in his recently published book, [The Death of Expertise](#).

In higher education, I think it is imperative that we teach our learners and peers about what it means to participate and interact in digital spaces and places. How can our institutions help students, staff, and faculty **“be” online and consider how both information and digital environments impact knowledge sharing** and learning.

1. Context and Information Fluency Are Vital First Steps

Digital literacy is multifaceted. The [New Media Consortium](#) provided a [Digital Literacy Strategic Brief](#) to identify **the role policy, practice, and curriculum can have on all facets of our campus**.

NMC defines digital literacy as “not just understanding how a tool works but also why it is useful in the real world and when to use it.” To improve our practices for improving this literacy, we **need to think broadly about strategic planning and the creation of standards at our campus**.

There are new opportunities to encourage learners to become content and media producers, identify technical competencies for the workforce with industry-education partnerships, and develop smart collaborations within community entities, such as governments, libraries, museums, and cultural heritage organizations.

Beyond digital competencies, we need to develop [media and information fluency](#) in higher education. The Association of College and Research Libraries has updated its literacy competency standards by developing a [Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education](#) to offer guidance “to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.”

Scholarly inquiry requires analyzing information for credibility and **understanding if an online resource is primary, secondary or irrelevant**.

To encourage both digital prowess and information fluency online, we need to develop skills around outline critical thinking for research, encourage digital teaming, and identify privacy, security and data issues online.

2. Critical Thinking with Online Research

Digital literacy and information fluency help us improve our understanding and **acquisition of knowledge to move beyond the #FakeNews fallacies** and make meaning of what we are learning.

In seeing how fast information travels with inaccurate content, I often wonder if my learners [understand how the internet works](#)? I think part of our responsibility as educators is to teach effective search processes online, in databases, and scholarly repositories to work in our classrooms.

Additionally, as we encourage students to share presentations or develop projects, it is critical to encourage citation and attribution of resources. Beyond using APA 6th edition format for referencing scholarly work, we also need to [scaffold content curation and sharing](#), specifically with regards to copyright, fair use, and creative commons

licensing.

Applying search skills in a course will help educators hone and **develop expertise beyond their degree and put these skills into practice in their work** and personal life. Here are a few examples of [Information Literacy Activities or Resources](#) you might include or apply in your course or program on campus.

3. Make Use of the Web for Collaboration and Problem-Solving

Part of being a member of a college or university community is the opportunity for discussion and discourse among peers. Both **scholarly inquiry and debate do not happen in a vacuum**. Learning experiences that offer ways to [evaluate information and to participate in civic online reasoning](#) help our students beyond course discussions, class activities, and assigned projects. With the advent of the social web and networked communication platforms, there is an increasing opportunity to gather virtual teams or to support distributed group work.

The [new social learning](#) helps us “join with others to make sense of and create new ideas...[it] is augmented with social media tools that bridge distance and time, enabling people to easily interact across workplace, passion, curiosity, skill or need. It benefits from **a diversity in types of intelligence and in the experiences of those learning.**”

These digital environments need to be woven into our pedagogical considerations and examined in context to support virtual teaming. Much of the creative problem solving, production development, and final products for learners can be self-directed via peers online.

Some examples I have used in practice and for instruction include [shared documents for education](#), [virtual group meetings](#), [hashtags for learning](#), and [on-demand, online office hours](#). There are many ways to learn and work from a distance — decide what your purpose or goal is first, and then explore what digital platforms to use.

4. Consider Digital Privacy, Security, and Data

To further this notion, we need to consider how we thrive in the digital age; this should start at our colleges and universities.

As human behavior and technology become intertwined, it will be **vital to secure our technologies, processes, and products online**. As we “live” online and [continue to get hacked online](#), we need to identify how we will operate in digital spaces and also prepare cybersecurity workforce capabilities online, as outlined in a [recent report issued by the Commission on Enhancing National Cybersecurity](#).

Higher education IT colleagues are constantly thinking about ways to [respond to cybersecurity attacks](#); however, **prevention and awareness among campus stakeholders should be priorities at our institutions**.

To have my own learners think more about their privacy and security, I have introduced them to samples of ideas through [WNYC’s Note To Self: Privacy Paradox](#) five-part series and the [Privacy Paradox tip sheet](#). Using these tools, the students start to understand how they are protecting their personal information — and perhaps even take back control as to where they share their personal data online.

Beyond this short course, I often have them listen to recent news reports, [CBC Spark](#), or [Reply All](#) episodes to discuss actual issues and events that could easily apply to their own digital life.