You may be using this book for any one of a variety of reasons. It may have been assigned by a professor, in whole or in part. You may be using it to enhance your research techniques for your classes. Or you may see the importance of being savvy about information use and production, and have decided to learn more on your own. After all, our world is defined by our easy access to information. In fact, as is often said, we are drowning in information. Some is valuable. Some is worthless. And some is just fun, in its proper context. As you know, information comes in many different formats and sometimes, depending on the content, information in one format can be in any of these categories. For example, a tweet could be valuable (maybe an expert on a topic has just announced something groundbreaking), worthless ("Going shopping. Looking for socks that don’t fall down."), or fun (I’ll let you decide what that message might be). So it seems that information content, context, and quality matter more than what kind of package or format the information takes. You will have a chance to read more about this later in the book. And accessing information is just one component; there is also your role as an information producer. We’ll get to that, too. You will learn a number of ways to enhance your abilities to work with the information that surrounds you.

So let’s start at the beginning. This book is entitled *The Information Literacy User’s Guide*. If you are information literate, you are adept at working with information. But a user’s guide can still be of assistance, since there are so many components to information. You, the authors, and just about everyone is better versed in working with some aspects of information than with others. While you will find elements in this book that you are totally up to speed on, there will be others that you have less familiarity with. Hence, the value of a user’s guide.

While this textbook refers to information literacy throughout, there are a variety of different models and subsets of information literacy: visual literacy, science literacy, digital literacy, information fluency, media literacy, and many more. Let’s highlight just one: metaliteracy. The originators of this model think of it as information literacy for today’s open, networked, collaborative information environment. It also places an emphasis on metacognition, or thinking about your own thinking. Being able to find and use information well means realizing what you know, what you don’t, and what you need to learn, and thinking about these categories throughout the process. It means being aware of how one is interacting with information, and not just reverting to long-standing habits only because they are familiar. There is a list of learning objectives for metaliterate learners at the end of this chapter, but we continue to identify occasional small changes to the objectives. The most current version can be found at [http://metaliteracy.org](http://metaliteracy.org).

You might think of the learning objectives as one of those headlines you see on magazine covers while waiting in a grocery store checkout lane: 1

6 Symptoms You Shouldn’t Ignore

50 People Who Make Your Life Better

Get 30% Richer This Year: Very Smart Money Tips

4 Panza-Blasting Moves for a Tighter Bod

Maybe there should be some catchy, motivational title for these learning objectives. (If you have a good idea, send it to one of the authors.) But, in seriousness, being aware of your own thought processes and working towards becoming more proficient in the areas included in the metaliteracy learning objectives will help you in your academic endeavors and in your everyday life. When you finish reading this introduction, take a look at the list. Are there items that you do
well? Are there others that you just need to remember to follow through on? Possibly some will be less familiar to you. Recognize that they are empowering behaviors and attributes that will advance your abilities in school, the workplace, and in daily life. Knowing this may well provide the motivation to follow through with the readings and exercises in the upcoming chapters.

This book is arranged using a model called the SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy. The model was developed in the United Kingdom, and revised in 2011, to reflect today’s information world. As you would expect, its visual representation shows pillars, each one labeled with a one-word access point to a larger concept. The pillars, with short explanatory descriptions, are

- Identify (understanding your information need)
- Scope (knowing what is available)
- Plan (developing research strategies)
- Gather (finding what you need)
- Evaluate (assessing your research process and findings)
- Manage (organizing information effectively and ethically)
- Present (sharing what you’ve learned)

The authors of this book have added two additional chapters to engage you in important areas not specifically represented by the pillars:

- Visual Literacy (applying information literacy to visual materials)
- Science Literacy (information literacy in the sciences)

The developers of the Seven Pillars model explain that an individual can be more expert in some areas than others, and has the ability to increase their expertise. But interestingly, they also mention that people can become less expert in the areas designated by the pillars. How might that be? If you learned something, and then learned more, you become more adept, right? They make the point, however, that because the information environment shifts all the time, it is possible people won’t keep up, and thus become less proficient. So just as someone can climb one of the pillars, so too can he or she slip down.

Each of the seven areas incorporates both abilities and understandings. The abilities include what an individual can do. The understandings cover both attitude and behaviors. For example, someone might be aware that they should carefully evaluate the information they find and know how to go about it, yet not care enough to actually do it. Abilities and understandings work together to enable information literacy. Near the beginning of each chapter, you will find pertinent abilities and understandings lists taken from the Seven Pillars model.

As mentioned earlier, you are likely skilled at some of the elements the book will be discussing, less so at others. In other words, you will have ascended some of the pillars more than others. This is true of the authors themselves. We teach information literacy and call ourselves experts. But we can still learn from our colleagues’ chapters on various facets of the nine areas covered in this book. We hope you will also find this to be the case.

This introductory chapter is intended to be short, and will end with an important recommendation: As you learn from this textbook, remember to reflect on your new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. What are you doing differently? Did you find
particular new approaches to locating or sharing information that work better? Why? Are you evaluating information more consistently? Differently? Do you feel more comfortable as an information producer? If you continue to ask yourself questions like these, and follow through based on your responses, your proficiency with information will last far beyond your memory of reading this textbook.

Note

If you encounter terms in this book whose meanings are not clear to you, start your investigation by looking at these two sites. The first provides definitions, while the second is a multilingual glossary that provides corresponding terms in six languages:

Definitions

http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/sections/is/iswebsite/projpubs/idpdefinitions.pdf

Glossary of terms, with English, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, French, Spanish, and Arabic:

http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/sections/is/iswebsite/projpubs/idplanguagetable.pdf

Appendix

Developing Metaliterate Learners

Metaliteracy learning falls into four domains: behavioral (what students should be able to do upon successful completion of learning activities—skills, competencies), cognitive (what students should know upon successful completion of learning activities—comprehension, organization, application, evaluation), affective (changes in learners’ emotions or attitudes through engagement with learning activities), and metacognitive (what learners think about their own thinking—a reflective understanding of how and why they learn, what they do and do not know, their preconceptions, and how to continue to learn). Each aspect of the main metaliteracy learning goals presented below applies to one or more of these categories, and is labeled as such (B for behavioral, C for cognitive, A for affective, M for metacognitive).

The learning objectives recognize that metaliterate “learners,” as they are called here, must learn continually, given the constantly and rapidly evolving information landscape. Instructors and learners can meet these objectives in a variety of ways, depending on the learning context, choosing from a menu of learning activities. The objectives are conceived broadly, so as to remain scalable, reproducible, and accessible in a range of contexts.

Goal 1: Evaluate content critically, including dynamic, online content that changes and evolves, such as article preprints, blogs, and wikis.

1. Place an information source in its context (for example, author’s purpose, format of information, and delivery mode) in order to ascertain the value of the material for that particular situation. (B, C)
2. Distinguish between editorial commentary and information presented from a more research-based perspective, recognizing that values and beliefs are embedded in all information. (C)

3. Determine the value of formal and informal information from various networked sources (scholarly, user-generated, OERs, etc.). (C)

4. Evaluate user response as an active researcher; understand the differing natures of feedback mechanisms and context in traditional and social media platforms. (B, C)

5. Appreciate the importance of assessing content from different sources, including dynamic content from social media, critically. (A)

Goal 2: Understand personal privacy, information ethics, and intellectual property issues in changing technology environments.

1. Differentiate between the production of original information and remixing or re-purposing open resources. (C)

2. Distinguish the kinds of information appropriate to reproduce and share publicly, and private information disseminated in more restricted/discreet environments. (C)

3. Use technology to build a positive web presence. (B)

4. Apply copyright and Creative Commons licensing as appropriate to the creation of original or repurposed information. (B)

5. Recognize the ethical considerations of sharing information. (A)

Goal 3: Share information and collaborate in a variety of participatory environments.

1. Participate conscientiously in collaborative environments. (B)

2. Take responsibility for participation in collaborative environments. (A)

3. Compare the unique attributes of different information formats (e.g., scholarly article, blog, wiki, online community), and have the ability to use these effectively and to cite information for the development of original content. (B)

4. Describe the potential impact of online resources for sharing information (text, images, video, and other media) in collaboration with others. (A)

5. Demonstrate the ability to translate information presented in one manner to another in order to best meet the needs of particular audiences; integrate information from multiple sources into coherent new forms. (M, C)

6. Effectively communicate personal and professional experiences to inform and assist others; and recognize that learners can also be teachers. (A, B)

7. Produce original content appropriate to specific needs in multiple media formats; transfer knowledge gained to new formats in unpredictable and evolving environments. (B)

8. Value user-generated content and critically evaluate contributions made by others: see self as a producer, as well as consumer, of information. (A)

9. Be open to global perspectives; use communication with others in a global context to encourage deep learning. (A)

Goal 4: Demonstrate ability to connect learning and research strategies with lifelong learning processes and personal, academic, and professional goals.

1. Determine scope of the question or task required to meet one’s needs. (C)

2. Reevaluate needs and next steps throughout the process. (C)

3. Demonstrate the importance of matching information needs and search strategies to appropriate search tools. (C)

4. Use self-reflection to assess one’s own learning and knowledge of the learning process. (M)
5. Demonstrate the ability to think critically in context and to transfer critical thinking to new learning. (M)

6. Value persistence, adaptability, and flexibility. (M)

7. Communicate effectively with collaborators in shared spaces and learn from multiple points of view. (M)

8. Recognize that learning is a process and that reflecting on errors or mistakes leads to new insights and discoveries. (M)

9. Engage in informed, self-directed learning that encourages a broader worldview through the global reach of today's information technology. (M)

10. Demonstrate self-empowerment through interaction and the presentation of ideas; gain the ability to see what is transferable, translatable, and teachable (learners are both students and teachers). (M)

11. Conclude that metaliteracy is a lifelong value and practice. (M)

Developed by participants involved in the SUNY Innovative Instruction Technology Grant, Developing a SUNY-wide Transliteracy Learning Collaborative to Promote Information and Technology Competencies for the 21st Century, based on objectives in Mackey and Jacobson, Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy, C & RL, 72.1 January 2011

http://crl.acrl.org/content/72/1/62.full.pdf+html

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The most up to date version can be found at http://metaliteracy.org

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Endnotes

1 The first two story headlines appeared on the cover of AARP, January/February 2013, the second was on Marie Claire, February 2013, and the last was on Cosmopolitan, Spring 2013.