

## Book review

### **Navigating information literacy: your information society survival toolkit**

Theo Bothma, Erica Cosijn, Ina Fourie and Cecilia Penzhorn

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The first edition of this work was published in 2006 under the title *Navigating information literacy*. The change of title and the short gap between editions mark a significant development in the field: from becoming a phenomenon to be explored, information literacy has become an essential component of the life skills we should acquire and strive to keep up-to-date. That said, the temptation for the writer or lecturer is to concentrate on the technology and its myriad wonders at the expense of encouraging the development of deeper understanding. Fortunately, the authors (all from the Department of Information Science of the University of Pretoria) have avoided this danger and have produced a text that will explain and inform whilst developing a foundation of principles. In this way, they have provided some “future proofing”: having acquired and put into practice the concepts in this book, the reader will be able to understand the significance of newer technologies, able to relate them to what has already been learned and understand how the newer technologies can be applied.

There are twelve chapters, following a developmental model: information literacy is firstly defined and the concept of the information literate person is explained. The question of assessment of competence is explained in sufficient detail for students to appreciate purpose and benefits. There after, the model progresses through information sources and resources (Chapter 2) and the organisation of information resources in portals and library websites (Chapter 3). The theme of searching is introduced in Chapter 4, with Chapter 5 concentrating on its particular application in searching the Internet and Chapter 6 on applying the principles to searching databases and online journals.

The next section might be termed “personal information management”: Chapter 7 considers the often neglected skill of organising and finding information on one’s computer. There is considerable value in including this topic – even otherwise sophisticated users of computers often display little appreciation of the value of developing a filing system and many are woefully ignorant of the range of resources available for doing this within all of the commonly-encountered operating systems.

The concept of plagiarism is poorly-understood by many students – and even some academics. Its avoidance, and the concomitant need for referencing and citation techniques, is a somewhat ‘dry’ subject to explain. In Chapter 8, the authors have taken a different approach by firstly setting the context for fair use of information and exploring what is meant by the ethical use of information and the implications of Intellectual Property Rights; only then is the concept of plagiarism introduced. The methods of detection of plagiarism, including some examples of the software used, are explained and due warning is given of the consequences of committing this academic crime. The chapter concludes with examples of how to avoid plagiarism and leads in to Chapter 9, where the concept of referencing and its techniques are explained, using the Harvard ‘author/date’ system as the main example and providing a lesser coverage of Vancouver, MLA, APA, and the Oxford footnote and end note systems. Care has been taken to explain how to find the components for a citation in the source material – a technical issue that is simple for those used to using bibliographic data but frequently a puzzle for the non-initiated. A helpful addition to this section would be to demonstrate how to use ‘View | Source’ in a browser to reveal the metadata (if it is present) in a webpage; the same point could usefully be included in Chapter 6, where the account of the ‘citation pearl growing’ strategy in searching is too brief.

Turning to use of information, Chapter 10 explains techniques for evaluating information and its sources and Chapter 11 considers the use of information in writing assignments and research reports. Conceptualising techniques, such as ‘mind mapping’, are explained. A useful additional reading for this chapter would be Tony and Barry Buzan’s *The mindmap book* (BBC Active, 2006). The importance of structure in writing is emphasised and the technical requirements of good presentation are also explained.

Chapter 12 explains the development of social software and introduces the nomenclature of Web 1.0, Web 2.0 and the Semantic Web. The main types of social networking software are outlined, with examples and screenshots. This chapter could well have become a ragbag of acronyms, abbreviations and technical wizardry: instead, the distinctive value of each approach is explained so that the reader can appreciate how this aspect of Web development can be integrated with the more familiar systems.

What makes this book especially welcome is the effectiveness of its information design. Each chapter commences with a sidebar listing outcomes and key terms and concludes with a set of questions aimed at developing critical thinking: these could be used for discussion, reflective thought or as part of an assessment. References and a chapter summary are also provided.

The book designers, Nimblemouse of Cape Town, have served the authors well. The text is clearly and attractively laid-out, with copious use of colour, screen shots, diagrams and images that capture the imagination. It has immediate visual appeal and prompts exploration of the text. The contents are delineated at two levels: an outline, followed by a more detailed contents list of each chapter. This device makes it easy to locate sections and, for the lecturer, to decide how to link themes together for a course or workshop. Different background colours are used for each chapter, making it easy to locate sections. The quality of reproduction is high – and this is especially evident with the screen shots, which can easily be read. A full index has been provided, an essential component of a text exploring how to manage information use.

Altogether, one would have no hesitation in putting this in the hands of students (or their parents) and expecting them to read it out of intrinsic curiosity rather than compulsion!

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