Information Literacy Instruction: A La Carte

[Information Literacy A La Carte](#)

Improving students' information literacy skills is at the core of the Rhetoric curriculum, and is therefore a major part of what students should learn in their Rhetoric class. Well-designed assignments related to information literacy focus on the following six frames developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries ([ACRL](#)): 1) authority is constructed and contextual; 2) information creation as a process; 3) information has value; 4) research as inquiry; 5) scholarship as conversation; 6) searching as strategic exploration. The A La Carte activities have been created in collaboration with the University of Iowa librarians. Instructors are therefore encouraged to consult with university librarians as to how to best utilize these resources. Please contact Undergraduate Engagement Librarian Cathy Cranston (cathy-cranston@uiowa.edu). The activities are designed to aid your students in developing information literacy skills, and have the potential of providing/mapping onto weekly lesson plans, or integrating with major assignments, depending on the instructor's curriculum design.

The assignments contained under the heading "A La Carte" are stand-alone lessons and activities that fall under twelve headings. Each of the twelve sections represents one component of improving information literacy, and contains both instructor lesson plans and student activity sheets or slideshows. Some are best used in conjunction with specific Rhetoric units (Rhetorical Analysis (Ru1), Mapping Issues/Describing Multiple Perspectives (Ru2), or Advocacy/Persuasion (Ru3)), while others could easily fit in at nearly any point in the semester. Suggested units to use in conjunction with the activities are noted alongside the 12 module summaries below, but they are all highly adaptable.

The twelve categories are:

1. **Tracking the Source** (Ru1)
   Students categorize visual resources (web, scholarly, magazine, video, etc.), and determine the format, authorship, and subject coverage of different sources. This assignment is used with the "Source Deck," a hard-copy collection of varied sources over a single topic, located in the A La Carte collection under the "Source Deck" heading.

2. **Publication Timeline** (Ru2)
   This assignment asks students to assemble an information timeline using the Source Deck, and helps students analyze the chronology of publications following a current event.

3. **Mapping the Information Path** (any unit)
   This lesson aids students in considering the importance of format as process, and asks students to chart the process that led to the creation of a specific resource. For example, the information path for a tweet differs wildly from that of a scholarly publication, and those differences make materials either more or less appropriate depending on the research topic/instance. You may introduce a version of this activity early on, and then return to it as students begin conducting more in-depth research.

4. **One Topic, Many Perspectives** (Ru2)
   One Topic, Many Perspectives works well with the Rhetoric Unit "Mapping an Issue," and asks students to consider the multi-faceted positions within any event, issue, or controversy through the creation of concept maps/visual bibliographies.

5. **Research as Inquiry** (Ru3)
   This unit uses a "Who, What, When, Where, Why" worksheet to help initiate students into conducting more effective research. It asks students to simply explain their topic and identity potential questions to answer, and interest points to explore. It also has students formulate a variety of keywords related to their topic, and explains how to use Google and Wikipedia to broaden a search. This activity is easily done either in class or as homework, and provides instructors with an accessible way to aid students in thinking about their research more thoroughly. This module works well as a precursor to the Rhetoric of Space assignment, but could be used alongside any major assignment.

6. **Information Need** (Ru2)
   This module helps students recognize different types of information (reference works, books, magazine articles, scholarly journal articles), and identify what information is most appropriate for a given research scenario. In doing so, students realize that sources of information vary by content, and determine the relationship between different kinds of information, and their information needs.

7. **Searching is Strategic** (any unit)
   This module focuses on teaching students that searching should be approached as a strategic exploration, complete with a plan of inquiry. The module is centered on giving instructors more activities focused on helping their students develop effective research methodologies (what to do when you hit a dead end, how to expand your keyword searches, the best places to find different information types, etc.)

8. **Who Wrote It** (Ru1)
   This activity aids students in examining their sources in terms of credibility, asking them to consider the author's opinions, credentials, objectivity, and lived experience (if applicable). This is a broad inquiry that could be easily applied and expanded to help Instructors craft lessons within many of the major Rhetoric units and projects.

9. **Information Types** (Ru3)
   This module varies from the "Information Need" section in that it focuses students' attention less on the appropriateness of an information type for a given topic, and more on the general characteristics of different information types and their various mediums. Information types include social media, TV/radio news, newspapers, and blog posts, and lines of inquiry include: who created the source, who is the audience for the source, how long did the source's production likely take, is the source researched, is it edited/vetted, and who has access to the source.

10. **Popular and Scholarly** (Ru2, Ru3)
    This module has students complete a Source Deck-based activity distinguishing between popular and scholarly sources. It asks: what are the different functions of popular sources and scholarly sources, and is one "better" than the other? Could a popular source be written by an academic or vice versa? What visual cues suggest that a source is one or the other, and what rhetorical function do these differences serve? This module may be most effective during Rhetoric Unit 2 or 3, after students have gained some familiarity with research methods and information types.

11. **Primary and Secondary** (Ru2)
    This module helps students to identify primary and secondary sources, and interrogate the different uses of both source types. This is a particularly useful module for Instructors opting into the Archives Alive! assignment, or any other Rhetoric assignment that ask students to work directly with a primary source, like assignments centered on one of the course's textbooks or nonfiction selections, or assignments focused on a documentary film. How does the student support their analysis of a primary text (a letter, a memoir, a film) by using secondary sources (articles, encyclopedias, a blog post) or other primary sources (similar letters, other books or films)?

12. **Creating Your Credibility** (any unit)
    This module can be tweaked to accompany both writing and speech assignments, and reminds students that authority is constructed, and contextual. Having already considered the credibility of research sources, students will now go about building their own credibility as an author and speaker. Versions of this activity would be appropriate at

different points in the semester depending on the major assignment the students are working toward; for example, the markers of strong credibility look different when the goal is to persuade, rather than to inform.

Creative Commons Licensing