

# Association of College & Research Libraries

## Information Literacy Competency Standards for Journalism Students and Professionals

*Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, October 2011*

[Superseded by Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Journalism \(April 2022\)](#)

### Background

Beginning in 2006, the Communication Studies Committee (Association of College & Research Libraries, Education & Behavioral Sciences Section) collaborated with a variety of organizations to develop information literacy competency standards for journalism undergraduate students, graduate students, and professionals. Committee members conducted a literature review, consulted with professional journalism organizations from 2007-2009, met with communication and journalism faculty in 2007, presented a draft at the 2007 National Communication Association conference, participated in ACRL discussions related to information literacy competency standards in the disciplines, and met with an ACRL Information Literacy consultant in 2008.

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### Introduction

The *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Journalism Students and Professionals* aim to adapt and apply the *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards*<sup>1</sup> to journalism. Information literacy is defined as the ability to recognize when

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<sup>1</sup> ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards:  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm>.

Support for information literacy also comes from national collegiate accrediting bodies, including: Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (Standard 11, pgs 34-35, Standard 12, p. 37)  
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (Standards 2 & 5)  
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (p. 11)

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (Standard Four, 4.6, 4.18)  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (sec. 3.4.14, 3.6.2, 3.8.1, 3.8.2, & 3.8.3)  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges (Standard 2.2).

information is needed and the ability to locate, evaluate, effectively use and ethically apply the needed information. The information literacy competencies for journalism take into account related literacies such as data, visual, news and media. The intended audiences for the standards are journalism educators, professionals, post-secondary students and the librarians who serve them. Journalism students and professionals who cultivate information literacy competencies are better able to select, critically read and ethically use information.

Journalism is an interdisciplinary and rapidly changing field of study. Technological change and media convergence are redefining the scope of journalism education. This document uses the term journalism with the understanding that this includes the fields of mass media and new media journalism. Research and the ethical use of information in journalism pose specific challenges to students and professionals. Challenges include the need to scan enormous amounts of multidisciplinary information, use a diverse array of information resources, and submit stories to multiple communication outlets (for example: newspapers, new media, radio, and television). Technologies such as blogging software and social networking resources make it easy for anyone to broadcast content. Journalists are concerned with the added challenge of leveraging these technologies while continuing to uphold the professional ethics and standards that distinguish them from citizen journalists. A strong information literacy foundation helps to build these ethics and ensures that journalists produce accurate and quality work in this rapid-paced news environment.

Journalism education research confirms the need for information literacy education. The research advocates that the development and application of information literacy competencies for journalism can enhance the quality of research and reporting, can provide journalism students and professionals more competitive job market skills, and improve the level of public discourse (Bornstein 2003). For this reason, many journalism education organizations already help promote standards of excellence in the field.<sup>2</sup>

The main purposes of the standards are to:

- enable the evaluation of the information literacy and research skills of journalism students and professionals by providing a structured set of competencies to assess
- provide faculty and librarians involved in curriculum planning, instructional settings and research consultations with common language to integrate information literacy competencies into journalism curricula.

The Committee aims to provide the academic and professional journalism community with a useful set of competencies and examples for successful research in the discipline. The Committee welcomes feedback and suggestions, and considers these

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<sup>2</sup> Organizations include: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc., the Knight Foundation, the National Communication Association, the Poynter Institute, National Association for Media Literacy Education and the Society of Professional Journalists.

standards a work in progress, as the discipline, curricula and profession change over time.

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<p><b>STANDARD ONE – PLAN</b>          Identifies needed resources, determines where to find resources, and estimates time and financial costs to access information</p>	
<p><b><i>The student or professional:</i></b>  <b>1. Defines the information need based on the story idea or research question</b></p>	
<p><b>OUTCOMES</b></p>	<p><b>EXAMPLES</b></p>
<p>a. Develops a story idea or research question</p>	<p>Possible sources of topics: Alerts, blogs, briefs, interviews, news feeds, press releases, speeches, and wires</p>
<p>b. Identifies who the audience for the story is</p>	<p>Story scope: Local/community, national, international</p> <p>Audiences: academic, community, interest groups (politicians, lawyers, business professionals)</p>
<p>c. Selects the appropriate writing style and voice for the media outlet selected</p>	<p>Writing styles: Op-ed, feature, human interest, review, event coverage, literary reportage</p> <p>Media outlets: Television, newspapers, community blogs, web publication, radio, multimedia presentation</p>
<p>d. Initiates research by reading and exploring background information in order to identify appropriate sources</p>	<p>Examples of background resources: Current newspaper and magazine articles, event histories (Facts.com, historical newspapers), biographical information, company histories, and scholarly encyclopedia entries</p>

e. Focuses the story idea or research question based on information found	Addresses questions such as: What news has not yet been covered? What news event has happened? Has it happened before? Who are the stakeholders? What does my audience need to know? How soon do they need to know it? What aspect of this story would my reader care about?
f. Brainstorms related topics and concepts for the key subject areas involved	Example: A story on global warming involves science, government policy, business interests and local, national, international communities
<b><i>The student or professional:</i></b> <b>2. Identifies a variety of information sources to meet the information need</b>	
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
a. Identifies what type of information source is needed to meet the information need	Addresses questions such as: Will I need to interview sources? Do I need to read personal blog coverage of a topic/issue? Do I need to consult historical or archival materials? Do I need to read scholarly analysis of a topic/issue?
b. Identifies core research resources required to meet the information need	LexisNexis, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Ethnic News Watch, U.S. Census, government websites, social media networks (to identify contacts), etc.
c. Identifies appropriate investigative methods	Interviews, computer-assisted research, primary source research, etc.
d. Identifies additional types of resources to include multiple perspectives	Enhances coverage of research question through a variety of resources.  Examples: Advocacy group publications, scholarly experts, data sets, government documents, industry reports, opinion polls, television and radio transcripts, think tank reports, etc.
e. Evaluates the scope and content of the chosen resources	Addresses questions such as: Who is the producer of the content? Does the

	database contain scholarly or news articles, images, audiovisual, etc.? Do I need to collect data? What are the pros and cons of the selected resources?
f. Plans to conduct original research	Design surveys, collect and analyze data, conduct interviews, etc.

***The student or professional:***  
**3. Considers financial costs and time required to obtain information**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Explores free or lower cost resources	Utilizes public or academic libraries or interlibrary loan rather than purchasing a book, uses government records rather than subscription databases, files a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, uses open access journals, etc.
b. Manages time by creating a schedule of when research or field work will be completed in accordance with deadlines	Creates research or story outline, defines short- and long-term deadlines, creates a research plan, etc.

**STANDARD TWO – FIND**

**Begins research using search strategies that are effective and efficient**

***The student or professional:***  
**1. Constructs and implements effectively designed research strategies**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Considers broader, narrower, and related terms and language used by those in the discipline	Global warming: Broader term=Environment, Related term=Climate change, Narrower terms=Climate change AND Developing countries
b. Develops a research strategy using Boolean operators, truncators, proximity operators, etc.	("Global warming" or "Climate change") and (Garden* or Plant* or Farm*)
c. Expands research using database controlled vocabularies specific to the discipline	Uses selected database's subject headings (sometimes called the thesaurus, topic, or descriptor) and Library of Congress subject

	headings to clarify or narrow research results
d. Applies search strategies to various research resources, adjusting for different user interfaces	Runs a search in LexisNexis and then adjusts the search strategy for other appropriate databases.
<b><i>The student or professional:</i></b> <b>2. Retrieves information online or in person using a variety of methods</b>	
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
a. Retrieves information needed through collections, services and individuals	Examples: Government documents, public records, court records, interlibrary loan/document delivery, professional associations, community resources, experts and practitioners
b. Uses research methods to conduct original research	Conducts research through surveys, interviews, archival research, and other forms of inquiry to retrieve primary information
<b><i>The student or professional:</i></b> <b>3. Refines investigative methods and search strategies</b>	
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
a. Identifies gaps in the information retrieved	Questions to address: Would polls or statistics enhance my research? Are there other experts or angles I might consider? Would databases or resources in another subject area provide an additional perspective?
b. Refines and repeats the search using the revised strategy as necessary	Questions to address: Would other search terms be more effective? Where else can I apply my search strategy?
<b><i>The student or professional:</i></b> <b>4. Uses records management and resource citation skills</b>	
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>

a. Creates a system for organizing the information	Electronic files, reference management tools (RefWorks, Zotero, EndNote), Google documents, Delicious, etc.
b. Records all pertinent citation information for future reference	Maintains a reporter's notebook, creates a document, or creates a voice-recording with backup notes.

**STANDARD THREE– EVALUATE FOR ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS**

Appraises information gathered for accuracy, balance, and relevance

***The student or professional:***

**1. Summarizes and synthesizes the main ideas of the information gathered**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Examines source material and identifies main ideas and facts.	Reads and summarizes newspaper articles, interview notes, television footage, etc.
b. Restates relevant source material in his/her own words in the language appropriate for the audience	Reads a study in the <i>Journal of the American Medical Association</i> and is able to summarize it for a general audience.
c. Identifies verbatim material for appropriate quotations and accurately quotes sources, respecting context.	Reviews audio-recording of interview for relevant quotes and verifies quotes with sources.

***The student or professional:***

**2. Assesses the credibility of the information gathered**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Examines and compares information from various sources in order to evaluate reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and bias	Checks public records to verify a statement made by an interviewee, reviews information sources to ensure balance and representation of different viewpoints, cross-checks facts, etc.
b. Identifies sources with alternate viewpoints to provide context and balance	Searches Ethnic News Watch to find articles in Jewish-American newspapers, in addition to mainstream news, when covering a story on a Jewish community.



c. Decides whether to incorporate or reject viewpoints encountered, always with the goal of fair and balanced reporting	Student/professional covering a labor union strike includes statements issued by both the union leaders and the company executives.
d. Analyzes the structure and logic of supporting arguments and methods used	When conducting media analysis, uses sound methodology, evaluates and cross-checks the methodology used in other research, such as public opinion polls.
e. Recognizes cultural, physical, or other context within which the information was created and its impact on interpreting the information	When covering an event situated in the Middle East, student/professional consults international and U.S. news sources; works with community members when interviewing specific community groups.

***The student or professional:***

**3. Synthesizes main ideas to generate new knowledge or story ideas**

<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
a. Recognizes interrelationships among concepts and combines them into potentially useful original statements with supporting evidence	Effectively synthesizes scholarly sources, original media analysis and primary sources to examine media coverage of a event or person, such as the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle.
b. Extends initial synthesis, when possible, to a higher level of abstraction to construct new story idea/angle that may require additional information	Student/professional sees a news article about city budget cuts. She decides to explore relationship between the recent budget cuts and the increase in the vermin population.

***The student or professional:***

**4. Compares new knowledge with prior knowledge to determine the value added, contradictions, or other unique characteristics of the information**

<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
a. Evaluates whether the new knowledge has an impact on the individual's value system and takes steps to reconcile differences	Investigates differing viewpoints encountered in information sources, following strategies outlined elsewhere in this document.

b. Draws conclusions based upon information gathered	Uses information gathered to construct a lede or nut graf.
c. Tests theories with discipline-appropriate techniques	Examples of theory-testing techniques: simulators, experiments.
d. Decides whether to incorporate or reject different viewpoints encountered	Questions to address: Does the information presented support my argument or add to my story? Which viewpoint(s) fairly represent a situation?

***The student or professional:***

**5. Validates knowledge of and interpretation of the information through dialogue with others**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Participates in critical discussions, either in person or online	Monitors blogs on a topic or comments in online forums.
b. Seeks expert opinion through a variety of mechanisms	Interviews an expert, emails a professor, calls a professional association, or consults with a reference librarian.

***The student or professional:***

**6. Decides whether the initial question or story idea should be revised**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Generates new ideas or revises story angles based on gaps in information sources	After reviewing stories on gentrification in Chicago neighborhoods, the journalist realizes there is a glut of information on the topic but that very little has been written on the impact of gentrification on homeless shelters. She re-focuses the story.

**STANDARD FOUR - DRAFT and CREATE**

**Writes the story by integrating information gathered**

***The student or professional:***

**1. Applies information gathered to the planning and creation of a story or research product**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
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a. Organizes the content in a manner that supports the purpose and format of the story	Organizes and writes story according to guidelines associated with a style--news story, feature, op-ed, multi-media, blog or academic publication.
b. Articulates own knowledge and any biases or affiliations that may influence the story	Discloses potential conflicts of interest to editor or in story piece (if appropriate or permissible) .
c. Integrates new and prior information, including quotations and paraphrases, in a manner that supports the purposes of the story or research question	Uses quotes and analysis from scholarly journal articles, news articles, interviews, and other sources to support research claim.
d. Effectively incorporates digital images, quotes, and data, as appropriate; ensures that graphics, etc. do not distort the tone or meaning of the story	Incorporates multimedia piece with images of homeless with article about the closing of a local homeless shelter.

***The student or professional:***

**2. Revises the development process for the story or research product**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Maintains a journal or log of activities related to the information seeking, evaluating, and communicating process	Maintains a reporter's handbook or uses web tool such as Zotero to keep track of information sources and findings.
b. Reflects on progress and identifies alternative strategies, as needed	Periodically assesses information gathered, as well as successes and failures. Identifies alternative ways to present information.

***The student or professional:***

**3. Effectively presents the story or research project to the intended audience**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Analyzes the presentation of the story, project or performance within the framework of journalism	Organizes and writes story according to guidelines associated with the style of the publication (ex. New York Times guidelines) or media outlet (ex. blog)
b. Incorporates principles of graphic design and	Critically evaluates layout of the story or

visual communication when appropriate	research product and effectively incorporates photographs, sidebars and graphics or videos, as appropriate.
c. Communicates clearly and with a style that is appropriate for the story, performance, or audience	Questions to address: What information should I include in my story in order to give my audience fair and objective reporting? Is my writing or presentation style appropriate for an academic audience or general audience? Does my story need to include a local perspective?

## **STANDARD FIVE – ETHICAL AND LEGAL STANDARDS**

**Applies professional standards throughout the research process**

*The student or professional:*

### **1. Recognizes the ethical, legal and socio-economic issues surrounding information and technology**

<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
a. Recognizes the role of journalists in the ethical use and publication of information	Abides by journalism ethics guidelines, as outlined by professional associations and organizations, such as Society of Professional Journalists and Poynter Institute. Seeks the objective truth, minimizes harm, acts independently, interviews a variety of sources, fact-checks, is publicly accountable.
b. Recognizes issues related to privacy and security in both the print and electronic environments	Examines privacy policies for different types of data or information accessed.
c. Recognizes issues related to censorship and freedom of speech	Reads and analyzes professional journalism organizations' censorship or freedom of speech guidelines and policies <a href="http://www.rcfp.org/handbook/">http://www.rcfp.org/handbook/</a>
d. Recognizes the FOIA and the First Amendment and their impact on the journalism profession and society	Recognizes how to apply First Amendment and knows how to file a FOIA request.

e. Recognizes and applies intellectual property, copyright, and Fair Use policies.	Questions to address: Do I have enough information to properly cite my sources? Am I using copyrighted material ethically and in accordance with Fair Use?
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***The student or professional:***  
**2. Follows laws, regulations, institutional policies, and etiquette around the ethical use of information**

OUTCOMES	EXAMPLES
a. Participates in online discussions following accepted practices	Uses personal information from social networking sites ethically, communicates in an appropriate, ethical, and transparent manner in online discussions or blog comments.
b. Applies journalism’s professional code of conduct and complies with institutional policies on access to information resources	Story or research product complies with professional or institutional policy on accessing information.
c. Legally obtains, stores, and disseminates text, data, images, or sounds.	Adheres to fair use and/or obtains copyright clearances and permissions through Creative Commons or the author of the work.
d. Retains transcripts and audio-recordings from interviews.	Considers the efficacy of preserving interview recordings and/or notes for a substantial period after the interview is published should questions regarding the source and/or veracity of the quoted interviewee(s) arise.
e. Examines the meaning of plagiarism and does not represent work attributable to others as their own	Questions to address: How much of the material presented is my own and how much is the work of another? Have I consulted my university's academic integrity policy? Have I consulted with a librarian, writing center tutor or professor if I have questions about plagiarism?

<p>f. Applies policies related to interviewing people and human subjects research; recognizes the ethical obligation to provide equal time and access to different interviewees as information sources</p>	<p>Example: "Shows compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Uses special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects." From Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics.</p>
<p>g. Applies professional standards for the ethical use of information.</p>	<p>Uses professional ethical standards from organizations including, Society of Professional Journalists, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Poynter, National Press Photographers Association, Radio-Television News Directors Association, etc.</p>

***The student or professional:***

**3. Cites the work of others and seeks permission when required**

<p><b>OUTCOMES</b></p>	<p><b>EXAMPLES</b></p>
<p>a. Selects an appropriate documentation style and uses it consistently to cite all information sources</p>	<p>Uses the Associated Press Stylebook or the citation style required by the publication, media outlet or discipline.</p>
<p>b. Posts permission granted notices for copyrighted material</p>	<p>Provides photography credit and copyright information for images used in a published news story.</p>
<p>c. Accurately attributes quotes to appropriate sources.</p>	<p>Provides citation information or attribution for all interviews, quotes from journal articles, statistics, etc.</p>

## **Appendix A: Resource Lists for Journalism**

The following resources include lists of core journals and subscription resources, as well as freely-available online resources:

Desai, S. (2011, January 24). New media. Retrieved May 14, 2011, from the Association of College & Research Libraries wiki:  
[http://wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/New\\_Media/\\_/Cyberculture](http://wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/New_Media/_/Cyberculture)

Garber, B. (2006, March/April). Journalism. *College & Research Libraries News*, 67(3), 151-154.

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## **Appendix B: Selected Bibliography**

This is a selected bibliography of current articles and books providing scholarly and professional discussion and analysis of information literacy in the disciplines of communication and journalism; critical thinking and learning outcomes in these disciplines; and models for journalism education and research.

### **Recommended Readings**

Bolding, J. (1996). Research skills instruction in undergraduate programs. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 51(1), 15-22.

Bornstein, Jerry. (2003). Journalism students and information competencies. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 7(3), 204-209.

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### **Works Consulted and Additional Reading**

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Castaeda, L., Murphy, S., & Hether, H. J. (2005). Teaching print, broadcast, and online journalism concurrently: A case study assessing a convergence curriculum. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 60(1), 57-70.

Deuze, M. (2006, February). Global journalism education. *Journalism Studies*, 7(1), 19-34.

Dilevko, J. (1998). Bibliographic instruction and mass media news literacy: A theoretical background. *Library Quarterly*, 68(4), 431-474.

Farhi, P. (2009). The Twitter explosion. *American Journalism Review*, 31(3), 26-31.

Gazze, M. (2009). Getting the most out of Facebook. *Media*, 14(2), 24-27.

George Washington University, & Cision. (2009). 2009 social media & online usage study. Retrieved from [http://us.cision.com/journalist\\_survey\\_2009/GW-Cision\\_Media\\_Report.pdf](http://us.cision.com/journalist_survey_2009/GW-Cision_Media_Report.pdf)

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## Professional Journalism Organizations: Codes and Standards

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- American Meteorological Society. (2011, May 10). AMS certification programs: Certified broadcast meteorologist program. Retrieved from <http://www.ametsoc.org/amscert/#cbm>
- American Society of Newspaper Editors. (1996). ASNE statement of principles. Retrieved from <http://www.asne.org/kiosk/archive/principi.htm>
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