

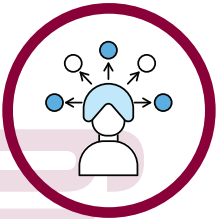


Using Information
for Decision Making
Snapshot



Essential Employability Skill #10: Using Information for Decision Making

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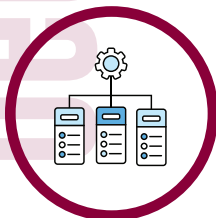
Using information for decision making is an overall ability to access, evaluate, and use information to create new information as well as to be an aware, active, and effective citizen in society and professional employment. The effective use of information for decision making encompasses many other needed skills individuals must master to better navigate life, educational pursuits, and professional responsibilities. These life skills include information literacy, media and digital literacy, critical thinking, and socio-emotional literacy.

Information literacy is the most important skill in becoming a life-long learner and effective user of information to aid in decision making. Information literacy refers to a constellation of competencies revolving around information research, use, and practice across all occupations and professions. This means finding information, assessing information, using information, documenting information sources, and ultimately creating your own information or knowledge. Overall, individuals must become critical consumers of information.

Information literacy relates to **media and digital literacy**, which is a set of competencies that empowers citizens to access, retrieve, understand, evaluate, create, and share information and media content critically, ethically, and effectively. Information is also a key element of **critical thinking**—evaluating information and ideas for deciding what to accept and believe. Information may be presented in text and other forms of multimedia and require critical reading, listening, and viewing. Lastly, using information for decision making contributes to **socio-emotional literacy**, which is knowing how to avoid traps such as mis-, dis-, and malinformation, as well as benefit from information and communication in all forms.

Why is using information for decision making important?

On a basic level, the ability to effectively use information for decision making is important because it facilitates critical thinking, encourages collaboration, and supports respectful discourse. Being information literate is becoming increasingly important due to the



decision making



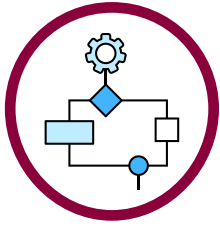
ubiquitous nature of data, information, and social media today. In fact, 68 percent of college students say the amount news they are subjected to can be overwhelming (Head, Wihbey, Metaxas, MacMillan & Cohen, 2018, p. 9). Being able to assess and evaluate information is important as the consumption of news and information has moved to online content and social media. For example, 89 percent of college students state they receive their weekly news from social media as opposed to other media outlets (Head et al., 2018, p. 10).

Due to the migration to online content, individuals are now faced with a wide range of dubious information from an array of sources that can result in highly charged arguments over supposed facts. In fact, individuals must now contend with mis-, dis-, and malinformation (MDM) daily that has resulted in public and social discourse becoming more polarized. To support a democratic society and effective social discourse, educating individuals on how to effectively use information for decision making is a considered a high priority.

What does attainment of the *using information for decision making* skill look like?

Overall, the effective use of information in decision making illustrates attainment of other important skills. These skills include the aforementioned information literacy, critical thinking, digital and media literacy, and socio-emotional literacy. As a whole, these skills support the use of information in decision making by enabling an individual to attain the following competencies:

- Understanding the content and context of a text.
- Engaging in careful, active, reflective, and analytical reading.
- Evaluating information and ideas and for deciding what to accept and believe.
- Reflecting on the validity of what has been read in light of prior knowledge and understanding.
- Performing thorough searches of reliable sources in various form of medium about an issue, problem, topic, etc.
- Knowing how to evaluate sources of information to identify possible biases, MDM, fake news, and other malignant information.
- Knowing when not to share content from an uncredible source or when a credible source to confirm information cannot be located.
- Recognizing and understanding the risk of MDM, fake news, etc., and how bad actors use these information activities to shape and manipulate behaviors and conversations on certain issues and topics.
- Questioning the source and/or author of information and investigating the information by searching reliable and credible sources.
- Using socio-emotional literacy by thinking about information and personal emotions and reactions before sharing or using information.
- Seeking disconfirming information and alternate viewpoints about an issue, problem, topic, etc., and ensuring investigated information is neutral.
- Understanding that MDM and fake news has real-world effects to include influencing behavior, inciting violence, and disrupting healthy democratic discussions and participation.
- Applying information through a synthesis of multiple sources.



What are classroom practices for building the *using information for decision making* skill?

The skill of using information for decision making can be practiced in the classroom in multiple ways. Although traditional practices can provide benefit (e.g., use of predeveloped datasets), other practices can be used that enable students to better engage with and evaluate information that they may face in the real-world outside of the classroom. For example, the information skills to guard against MDM can be practiced through online games such as GO VIRAL!, which is a five-minute game that addresses COVID-19 misinformation. Continuing on the topic of MDM, assignments that require evaluation of information/sources through the SIFT methodology are also beneficial as this methodology reinforces many of the aforementioned skills including information literacy and socio-emotional literacy by instructing individuals to:

- Stop.**
- Investigate the source.**
- Find better coverage.**
- Trace claims, quotes, and media to the original context.**

Other possible practices to support evaluation of information include using the elements of thought within the Paul-Elder critical thinking framework (Paul & Elder, 2006). Doing so requires that students think about information through the lens of the other elements of thought—purpose, question, point of view, inferences, concepts, implications, and assumptions. Faculty may also consider integrating an activity using the CRAAP method, which examines the Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose of a piece of information. For an example exercise, see: <https://guides.library.illinoisstate.edu/evaluating/craap>. A precursor to many of these activities is the ability to find and locate information; therefore, they should be coupled with others that require the use of academic databases, scholarly journals, grey literature, as well as general Internet searching and information search operations (e.g., Boolean operators). Overall, there are a litany of possible practices to implement in the classroom that allow individuals to practice the underlying skills that are part of the overall ability to use information for decision making.

References

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- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools*. The Foundation for Critical Thinking.



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