Thinking About Information
Marietta College Library
Fall 2007
Session 1

Outline of What to Expect Today
A. Defining information
B. Where to find it?
C. What does it do?
D. How is it organized?
E. How to get started?

What is Information?
A hard concept to define with any precision. We collect and our brains filter information every waking minute. Information can be things that we derive from study, experience, or instruction. We receive information from specific events gathered by communication or news. Information can also come our way through facts, data, or statistical information. All of this colors our perceptions of the world and influences all of our attitudes, emotions, and actions.

Where Can Information be Found?
Virtually anywhere! Some obvious places would include:
- Your own senses
- The people around you
- Television
- Radio
- Newspapers
- Magazines & journals
- Internet
- Books

What Can Information Do?
Wherever we find it information can provide answers to the following:
- Who
- What
- Where
- When

Is Information Knowledge?
No! You can have a lot of information and not know anything. Knowledge comes from the mastery of the information that we observe and process in the world around us. Knowledge is what we construct with the “who”, “what”, “where”, and “when” that information provides us.
Why Think About Things Like Information and Knowledge?
- It unifies all of your studies
- All of your classes will deal with some aspect of information
- Will be the basis of many decisions in life
- Has a growing economic importance for society
- Wealth is increasingly tied to information

How is Information Organized?
- Primary sources
- Secondary sources
- Tertiary sources

Primary Sources
- Original materials on which other research is based
- Information in its original form neither interpreted or evaluated by others
- From the time period in which the information first appeared
- Original thinking on discoveries or new information

Examples of Primary Sources
- Diary of a soldier in Iraq
- E-mail notes of a scientist reporting on research just completed
- Trial transcript of the O.J. Simpson trial
- Television interview with a rapper on suggestive lyrics
- Your birth certificate
- Census data showing how many people live near your neighborhood
- Photograph from 1972 showing how the Marietta College campus looked at that time

What are Primary Sources Good for?
- Providing raw materials out of which history and discovery are made
- Providing a basis for evidence and a starting point for analysis
- Providing a real access point to a given time and place

Secondary Sources
- Interpretations, analysis, and evaluation of primary sources
- Discussions of the evidence and issues raised by primary sources
- Appear after the fact or in hindsight
Examples of Secondary Sources
- A biography of Barry Bonds
- An article in a political science journal on the impact of bloggers on the 2004 election
- A book of commentary on the work of Stephen King
- An article in a news magazine about how census data shows that Ohio is losing population
- A review on a fantasy website of the latest Harry Potter book.

What are Secondary Sources Good For?
- Discovering how a subject or topic can be synthesized and described
- Understanding how evidence can be analyzed and evaluated

Tertiary Sources
- Can often be "reference material"
- Works that list primary and secondary sources by subject
- Works that describe how to use a collection of primary or secondary sources
- Material in which primary source information may be condensed, described, or reformatted for quick and easy use

Examples of Tertiary Sources
- World Almanac
- Encyclopedia Britannica
- Website listing other websites in psychology
- Google
- Oxford English Dictionary

What are Tertiary Sources Good For?
- Establishing an overview or introduction to a subject
- Discovering what materials might exist for a particular topic
- A "blueprint" to use in finding out how to research something

Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources
Let's stop and do an activity that will allow you to distinguish between different kinds of information!
Finding Information: How to start?

- Determine nature of the information need
- Asking, formulating, and refining questions

Determine Nature of Information Needed

- Examine your situation, confer with teachers/professors, talk with friends, or experts to identify an assignment, research project, or daily problem that needs to be solved
- Determine a focus by modifying what might be needed
- Think about what information you might need to tackle the problem: background information, statistics, price quotes, etc.

Asking, Formulating, and Refining Questions

- Formulate a central question based on the information need
- Test the question against the available information
- Keep or modify your question as information is discovered

Finding Information: How to Start?

Let's stop and do an activity that will get you thinking about starting to look for information!

Outline of What to Expect Today

A. Evaluating information
B. Appropriate use of information
C. Resources to consider for an information problem

Thinking About Information

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Session 2
Evaluating Information

Regardless if your source is primary, secondary, or tertiary information will need to be evaluated. Some things you will need to keep in mind include:

- Scope
- Audience
- Timeliness
- Authorship
- Objectivity
- Scholarly vs. Popular

Scope

- What is the breadth of the information?
- Is it a general overview?
- Does it focus on a specific aspect of a topic?
- Does it cover the time period you are interested in?
- Does the information match your expectations?

Audience

- Who is the intended audience?
- Is the material technical and geared to experts in a field?
- Is it basic designed for people first discovering a topic?
- Can the information be of benefit across multiple audiences?

Timeliness

- When was the information published?
- When was something said?
- How often is a website updated?
- Is currency important for your problem?

Authorship

- Who is responsible for creating a piece of information?
- What credentials do they have?
- What else have they written or created?
- How much authority should you grant the writer or creator of a piece of information?

Objectivity

- Does the information have a point of view?
- Does it argue for a specific position?
- Is it sponsored by a company or organization that has an agenda?
- Does it want to change how you look at something?
- Is it trying to sell you something?
Scholarly vs. Popular

Of particular importance for college students to keep this distinction in mind when evaluating information. You will absolutely encounter it in your studies at Marietta College!

Scholarly Information

- Information that is published or created by and for experts
- Will often present new research
- Often be “peer reviewed” by a group of experts in the author’s field

Examples of Scholarly Information

- A paper that was the basis of a presentation at a conference of research scientists
- An extensively footnoted book about the Ohio frontier by a historian that teaches at Marietta College
- An article published in a biology journal that publishes other articles about biology

Examples of Popular Information

- Information created for a non-expert general audience
- Authored or created by journalists and non-experts
- Designed to inform and entertain rather than report on new research or thinking

Examples of Popular Information

- The latest Harry Potter book
- A DVD highlighting moments from Ohio State’s 2002 national championship football team
- A newspaper article about a flood in Marietta
- Article in Newsweek magazine about events in Iraq
- Article in Time magazine with glossy photographs and biographical sketches about important newsmakers in 2007

Scholarly vs Popular Information

Let’s do an activity that will get you thinking about the differences between the scholarly and the popular.
Making Appropriate and Ethical Use of Information

Your assembly and use of information has implications for yourself and others! Please consider:

- Intellectual property and copyright issues when using information
- Properly credit sources and avoid plagiarism

Intellectual Property and Copyright

- Information is the property of its authors and is protected by copyright
- These protections extend to the internet
- Must consider the use your making of information to protect the rights of others
- Most of your classroom activities are covered by "fair use" and don't involve you making agreements with the authors
- Wide copying, distribution, or sale of whole or parts of information sources may involve real consideration of copyright
- Be safe! Stay out of trouble! Be aware of possible conflicts!

Giving Credit and Citing Sources

- Always give credit when using someone else's idea or opinion
- Always credit the source of any numbers, graphs, or statistics you may be using
- Always credit when you use a direct quote
- Always cite the source of a paraphrase
- Always be safe! When in doubt cite!

Some Common Citation Styles

- American Psychological Association (APA) is often used in the social sciences
- Chicago Manual of Style gives guidelines for publishing in general
- Council of Science Editors (CSE) is popular in the sciences
- Modern Language Association (MLA) is frequently used in the humanities
- Turabian is another standard style for the humanities
- RefWorks is a citation management system that Marietta College subscribes that can integrate these different styles into a research paper

Avoid Plagiarism

A very big heap of trouble. Plagiarism is the consequence of failing to cite and give proper credit. Plagiarism can be:

- Buying or downloading a paper from a mill or research service
- Using another students work as your own
- Lifting a speech and giving it as your own
- Copying or lifting a portion of another's written work
- Paraphrasing without giving proper credit
- Always be safe! When in doubt cite!

Resources to Consider When Facing an Information Problem

- Professors- have subject expertise
- Professionals- are practitioners in a field
- Friends- may have experienced things you haven't
- Internet- dynamic storage and communication technology can allow very fast access to vast amounts of information
- Popular media- television, radio, and hand held devices can keep you tied to things that are happening
- Library- contains a vast amount of organized information including internet access, print sources and other electronic sources
Beware of the “Internet Fallacy”

- The false belief that everything is free on the internet
- Virtually all copyrighted protected documents are not available for free on the internet
- The majority of everything published including nearly all books and articles are not to be found on the internet
- The internet contains valuable information but it is mostly populated with things designed to inform or entertain and has very little scholarly content

Why the Library May be the Best Place to Turn When Facing an Information Problem

Libraries as collections have real advantages for research and gathering information:
- Can browse, read, and take out books most of which you will not find on the internet
- Ability to access and read newspapers, articles, and journals
- Access to resources that will point to research in different fields
- Access to primary resources
- Free internet access
- Access to subscription only databases
- Access to information that is filtered and organized with a high percentage of material authored by authorities or experts
- Personal assistance by librarians and information professionals

Marietta College Library

- The library serving Marietta College
- A book collection of 250,000
- A collection of core magazine and journals for all of the fields taught in the college
- Through the OhioLINK network we can access millions more books from the collections of 85 colleges and universities from around the state
- Have access to a vast collection of electronic databases that provide access to research literature from the sciences, humanities, and the social sciences
- Through the interlibrary loan program the library can provide even more access to specialized material from across the country and the world

Pay Us a Visit!

- On the 4th & 5th floors of Mills Hall
- Visit our webpage: http://library.marietta.edu
- Email: MCLibraryInfo@marietta.edu
- Instant messenger: MCLibraryInfo
- Telephone: 740-376-4543
- Hope to see you soon!