

## **The Relevance of Information Literacy and Academic Writing in Foreign Language Education**

### ***Saltanat A. Meiramova***

A.K. Kussayinov Eurasian Humanities Institute, Astana, Kazakhstan

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3204-1523>

e-mail: saltanat.m@mail.ru

### ***Gulzara Suleimenova***

Abylai khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages, Almaty, Kazakhstan

e-mail: a.umurzak@mail.ru

### ***Ratko Knezevic***

University of Bihac, Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-00000809-1478>

e-mail: kratko1962@gmail.com

### ***Madina Zh. Tussupbekova***

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1285-1959>

e-mail: madinatussupbekova@gmail.com

Nowadays information literacy (IL) is an indispensable competence as information is ubiquitous and overwhelming. This competence is required in all spheres and should be constantly improved. The article aims to pinpoint the opportunities of integrating information literacy into academic writing as the latter is one of the fundamental skills that students acquire and expand throughout most of the University courses. To attain the goal the authors reviewed various interpretations of the duration “information literacy” stated by different researchers, designed and realized assignments aimed at integrating information literacy and academic writing, carried out a preliminary analysis of the results obtained, and formulated perspectives for further research. Information literacy is an integral portion of bachelor, master, and PhD courses. It can be implemented in all educational forms, namely, individual, pair, group, and class activities. One of the fruitful prospects for further research is designing courses and programmes for teachers to involve them in more active information literacy integration into the educational process.

**Keywords:** academic writing, information literacy, media studies, media literacy, pedagogical experiment, technological progress.

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## Introduction

The modern world is overloaded with a variety of information; information is everywhere, and people perceive it differently. Modern mass media offer a huge amount of news, facts and opinions that are not always trustworthy and, therefore, must be verified. That is why information literacy plays a crucial role in shaping people's horizons and forms the basis of education.

Information competencies are a key factor in lifelong learning. They are the first step towards achieving educational goals. Citizens should develop their information competencies throughout their lives, especially during their studies, and here librarians, as members of the educational community and information specialists, play or should learn to play a key role in ensuring information literacy. Using their creative abilities and professional capabilities and relying on the program, integrated into the training courses, librarians should actively contribute to the learning process, helping students in their quest to acquire and improve the skills and abilities, knowledge and values necessary for continuing education throughout life.

Information is a resource that has different definitions depending on the format and environment used for its packaging and transmission, as well as depending on the field of knowledge where its definition is given. Case [2] gives a broader definition. Synonymous terms: “hidden” knowledge; the “package” of human experience; a source capable of providing countless amounts of data; a resource with various formats, packaging methods, transfer environment and delivery methods; people: family, friends, teachers, fellow students; institutions, for example, specialized public health institutions or social institutions.

Information has become an extremely important source for the global economy and, of course, a basic component of education and scientific and technological progress. Information poses many problems for all segments of the population: students, workers and any other citizens. Modern information overload forces people to check and evaluate information to make sure it is reliable. However, information by itself does not make people information literate. The information is undoubtedly:

- the most important element of creativity and innovation;
- the main resource of education and mental activity;
- a key resource for the formation of more educated citizens;
- a factor that allows citizens to achieve the best results in scientific activity, in
- the field of health, in work;
- an important resource for socio-economic development.

Information literacy is related to other, similar, types of literacy, but should be differentiated. This is especially true for information technology proficiency, network literacy, digital literacy, Internet literacy, computer literacy and media literacy [1].

The last two types of literacy are clearly defined by Horton [5] as follows:

*Computer literacy*, that is knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for understanding information and communication technologies (ICT), including hardware, software facilities, systems, networks (local area networks and the Internet) and all other elements of computers and telecommunication systems.

*Media literacy*: knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to understand all means (mass) communication and formats in which data, information and knowledge are created, stored, transmitted and presented (for example, printed newspapers and magazines, radio and television, cable media, CD, DVD, mobile phones, PDF text formats, JPEG format for photographs and graphic images).

Since in the 21st century people receive information from many sources, some researchers suggest other terms that combine different concepts of literacy. Mackey and Jacobson coined the term “metaliterature” [8]. Being the basis for media, digital, ICT and visual literacy, it makes it possible not only to access, evaluate and analyze information, but also to create content and share it through a wide

range of media. More recent studies [8] suggest that a metaliterary student should be an informed, cooperative, participatory, reflective, civic-minded, adaptable, open and productive person. The authors claim that metaliterature influenced the revised version of IL proposed by the Association of Colleges and Research Libraries and show the relationship between the characteristics of a metaliterature student and the corresponding knowledge acquisition practices and aptitudes.

Thus, in a wide range of mass media today, it is vital to know not only where and how to find the necessary information, but, more importantly, how to distinguish truth from lies, detect and reject disinformation, fake news and, based on this knowledge, create new, trustworthy information. In this sense, IL merges with media literacy and becomes a fundamental part of general literacy.

### **Method**

The purpose of this article is to study the ways of developing IL when mastering academic writing. First, we examined the concept of IL from the point of view of researchers and noted some new characteristics that can be added to this term nowadays. Then we analyzed the roles of teachers and other educators in the IL learning process. The data collected from open Internet articles on this topic allowed us to highlight the most interesting examples of teaching IL in various educational institutions. In the “Results” section, we presented a set of tasks for combining English teaching with academic writing, which was tested at our University (Abylai khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages, Kazakhstan). In the course of the research, we used content analysis of sources and generalization of our pedagogical experience. It should be noted that all three levels of higher education (bachelor’s, master’s) were involved in the study.

An interesting example of the introduction of games into IL training was proposed by Glenn Kelling and Alissa Russo [6]. They created the Mystery Room based on the game, which consists of several stages where players have to complete some tasks or solve a problem before moving on to the next stage. The main goal of the Mystery Room was the introduction of research information formats, such as newspapers, magazines, scientific books and periodicals. The plot of the game was based on the story of the theft of an academic manuscript. The students had to find her with about the evidence left by the thief. Trying to find the right document, the participants solved puzzles, searched databases,

solved crosswords and used the library catalog. The game turned out to be very useful, students got acquainted with information formats in the most fascinating and effective way.

Another method in the IL class is case-based learning. A well-made case serves a variety of educational purposes, but its good design requires a lot of time and effort. However, the use of subject-oriented case studies in IL increases students' confidence and competence in the field under study and develops their critical skills [4].

Generation Z is the first generation that was born and lived in the digital world. They cannot imagine their life without gadgets and the Internet, sometimes being more literate in modern technologies than their teachers. That's why educators are constantly offering a range of strategies, software and applications to improve IL for people of all ages, ranging from children and ending with adults [3, 7].

## **Results**

In order to consistently integrate IL into the educational process, we have combined several academic subjects within the bachelor's, Master's and PhD programs. As part of the bachelor's degree program, IL was introduced when writing term papers and theses (both subjects are taught in English). Undergraduates completed a course of academic writing and speaking in English. They had to write a motivation letter, an essay and make a presentation.

### *Information literacy for undergraduate students*

Both assignments (coursework and thesis) that undergraduate students complete as part of their studies are similar in the sense that they assume research skills, critical thinking and writing skills, but they assume increasing complexity.

Firstly, together with the supervisor, students determine the topic of their research. This can be done through discussions with teachers and peers, in working groups and during brainstorming sessions. It is important to determine the scope of the study and research questions. In order to do this, a literature review is needed to highlight the gap that will be covered by the study. At this stage, students register and get acquainted with a number of available search engines and databases. They are currently exploring the possibilities of a scientific electronic library (<https://elibrary.ru>), Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>), ScienceDirect (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/>) and

ResearchGate (<https://www.researchgate.net/>). To plan a study, students need to get an idea of the topic, identify key concepts and terms, and coordinate the successive stages of the study.

Secondly, an understanding of the many types and formats of information sources should be formed. It is necessary to understand how information, namely research, is organized, prepared, distributed and accessed. It is necessary to determine the purpose and target audience of the article. Students should be aware of the differences between primary, secondary and tertiary sources and the sequence of work with them. Since access to some resources and documents is paid, the student should think about the costs and benefits of acquiring such documents.

Thirdly, the student begins to search for literature. At this stage, it is important to identify keywords and synonyms to make the search for information productive; use various search engines and engines for search; evaluate the volume and relevance of search results; continue the search if any information turns out to be useful.

The following step is aimed at understanding the structure, function, and features of different types of essays. Students are asked to compile as many essay types as they can. These can be an opinion essay, an advantages/disadvantages essay, a general-specific essay, a cause and effect essay, etc. The residence assignment at this moment is to discover at minimum four essays of various types, analyse their structures, and fill in the trying to formulate the elements of every type. Depending on the speech proficiency of the students they can be offered or not an example of how to cope with the task (table):

Table

**Example of how to cope with the academic writing task**

	<b>Opinion essay</b>	<b>Advantages/ disadvantages essay</b>	<b>Problem solution</b>	<b>Discursive essay</b>
Introduction Paragraph 1				
Main part	Paragraph 1	Advantages/arguments for		
	Paragraph 2	Disadvantages /arguments against		
Conclusion Paragraph 4		Balanced consideration or own opinion without personal words		

The course “Academic Writing and Oral Speech” ends with an academic presentation demonstrated in the classroom. The goal is to help students create a clear, coherent and memorable presentation as part of their study.

## Discussion

Students should conduct research and write academic papers throughout their studies at the university. To accomplish this task, they cannot do without literature and sources of information. Currently, these sources are available online, but in order not to get lost in the avalanche of information, critically and responsibly evaluate it and create a coherent and reasoned text, they must master the skills of IL. With the constant emergence of new information and communication technologies, new sources of information, new scientific paradigms, new social requirements, etc., this means that there is no absolute IL, and everyone should develop IL skills throughout life.

Thus, we consider IL as the most important element of any educated person, since it includes the development of lifelong learning skills, helps to control self-education, forms the best academic writing skills, improves and facilitates progress in education. Further, we would suggest using a unified approach to information literacy throughout the educational process, integrating IL programs into university courses that cover all disciplines, as far as applicable, offering courses and programs for teaching staff so that they are be more flexible and work as part of a team, step up the cooperation of all stakeholders to ensure the effective development of IL.

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### ***Information about the authors***

*Saltanat A. Meiramova*, candidate of pedagogical sciences, Associate Professor of pedagogy, Professor of Foreign Languages Department at A.K. Kussayinov Eurasian Humanities Institute, Astana, Kazakhstan, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3204-1523>, e-mail: [saltanat.m@mail.ru](mailto:saltanat.m@mail.ru)

*Gulzara Suleimenova*, master of Abylai khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages, Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: [a.umurzak@mail.ru](mailto:a.umurzak@mail.ru)

*Ratko Knezevic*, PhD of University of Bihac, Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-00000809-1478>, e-mail: [kratko1962@gmail.com](mailto:kratko1962@gmail.com)

*Madina Zh. Tussupbekova*, candidate of pedagogical sciences, Associate Professor of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1285-1959>, e-mail: [madinatussupbekova@gmail.com](mailto:madinatussupbekova@gmail.com)