

Digital Literacy

*An understanding of the societal issues surrounding technologies,
and the ability to find, capture and evaluate information.*

The internet provides a global platform, allowing us to create and share content with the rest of humanity. In turn, this has afforded us a level of immortality via the content we upload and leave behind.

The rapid growth of digital technologies has changed the way we communicate with other people, and how we find, capture and evaluate the vast amount of information available to us.



Literacy

Linguistic evolution is nothing new. We know humans communicated orally for a few hundred thousand years before the development of written language. Then, instead of passing knowledge from parent to child in this way, which was always at risk of being forgotten or misunderstood, we began to scratch out the first symbols and pictograms to represent our ideas. This information was more easily passed down to countless generations, to be iterated upon and to expand the knowledge of our entire civilisation.

“When ancient Mesopotamians started settling down onto farms surrounding the first cities, life became a bit more complicated. Agriculture required expertise and detailed recordkeeping, two elements that led directly to the invention of writing, historians say.”¹

This recording of our achievements, ideas and history caused an explosion of technological, economic and cultural progress eventually leading to the internet, four thousand years later. The internet effectively gives us access to the biggest encyclopaedia our civilisation has ever seen, with information about any subject you can think of.

“Wikipedia is the greatest creation of massive collaboration so far. That we have a continuously updated, working draft of history that captures the state of human knowledge down to the granularity of each second is unique in the human experience.”²

However, a number of questions arise about the legitimacy of all of this “knowledge”. How reliable is the information you are reading? Where did it come from? Who wrote it, and why do you trust them? Do they have an agenda or angle? Is it relevant and up to date? We have a duty, especially in our “post-truth”, “fake news” society, to question the credibility of the information we are presented with.

¹ Whipps, H. How Writing Changed The World. (Accessed February 23, 2017) <http://www.livescience.com/2283-writing-changed-world.html>

² Lih, A. The refinement of information. (Accessed February 23, 2017) <https://www.edge.org/responses/how-is-the-internet-changing-the-way-you-think>

“Texts of any kind, be they on parchment or available through electronic systems, are only as useful as they are accurate. In the days when books were prepared by hand the accuracy of scribes was recognized as being of paramount importance. In a rather different way, but of equal importance, we depend upon the rigor of the research done by those whose electronically reproduced articles we read.”³

We now start to see the bigger picture of digital literacy. It is not simply digital skills such as the ability to access the internet, use a smartphone, post on Facebook or use your laptop. Nor is it basic computer skills which encompass use of programs such as word processing tools, or web browsers. Rather, it is understanding behavioural protocols and using critical thinking to become an effective citizen in today’s digital world.

Find, capture and evaluate

“There are over 600 million active websites in the world, many of which are protected by free speech and anti-censorship laws. Website owners can print anything they want, true or not, without worrying about the consequences. With so much content and so little oversight, determining which information is reliable can be a daunting task.”⁴

With so much information available online, it can be hard to identify reliable sources. The University of Aberdeen Library has put together a fantastic range of support materials about finding, capturing and evaluating information.

Find

Finding information involves a lot more than just typing keywords into your favourite search engine. For a short overview of evaluating web sources, check out this 60-second guide from whoishostingthis.com.

Think about:

- Who published the information?
- Who is accountable for the information?
- Is the information current?
- Where did the source information come from, and is it cited?
- Was the information linked from another reliable site?



Capture

You can capture online information with tools such as RefGrab-It.

RefGrab-It allows you to **capture bibliographic information from web pages**, providing the option to import data into your RefWorks account.



How does it work? After you install **RefGrab-It** (as a bookmark in your browser), the next time you click the RefGrab-it link or icon, it will look for information on the web page. If an **ISBN number, PubMed ID, DOI (digital object identifier)** is on the web page, **RefGrab-It** will take that information, and search various web resources for supplemental information or relevant **RSS feeds**.⁵

³ Wilmut, I. The Internet has not changed the way I think. (Accessed February 23, 2017) <https://www.edge.org/responses/how-is-the-internet-changing-the-way-you-think>

⁴ How to Search and Determine Credible Sources on the Internet. (Accessed February 24, 2017) <http://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/credible-sources/>

⁵ RefWorks Capturing Web Page Data. (Accessed February 24, 2017) https://www.refworks.com/refworks/help/Using_RefGrab-It_to_Capture_Web_Page_Data.htm

Evaluate

Again, the University of Aberdeen Library provides some interesting and useful guidance about evaluating sources, and have kindly let us reproduce their helpful mnemonic – **PROMPT** – as a guide to critically appraise your information:

Presentation	is the information <i>presented</i> in a clear and readable way?
Relevance	is the information appropriate and <i>relevant</i> to the purpose in hand?
Objectivity	is the content <i>balanced</i> or is there some bias?
Method	how was the information <i>gathered</i> together?
Provenance	who or what <i>originated</i> the information and are they <i>reliable</i> sources?
Timeliness	is the information <i>up-to-date</i> and does it matter in the context of your search topic?

Digitally Literate You

So now you know what digital literacy looks like, how do you present the best version of yourself digitally to future employers and networks and make sure they are aware of you and your skills? Well, you might want to think about the first impression you are making.

We are starting to describe the digital footprints we leave behind as digital tattoos. It is not a footprint that can be blown away; it is etched onto your reputation forever. It can be lightly removed by using legislation such as The Right to be Forgotten, but some interactions can never be erased.

Think about the politicians and celebrities that tweet in anger or post an inappropriate picture. Often, they remove these within hours or minutes of posting, but by then the damage is already done and others have taken screenshots, reposted and shared the evidence with tens of thousands of people around the world. As soon as the content is removed from one site, several more clones pop up elsewhere.

So, think before you upload, comment or contribute to the digital environment. Ask yourself if you would be happy for the people you love and respect to view your upload.

Now consider what you may have posted or uploaded in the past:

- Do you have an old MySpace?
- Do you have inappropriate pictures on Facebook?
- Are you a member of a nefarious or malicious group on a social network?
- Is your email address appropriate, or something you found funny in your early teens?
- What comes up when you Google yourself?



Cleaning up old, factually incorrect, or uncomplimentary digital tattoos is the first step in presenting yourself in your best light. The second step is creating fresh and engaging information about your interests, achievements and accolades. Our tips for using social media safely may help you get started.

CVs

An up to date, informative and attractive CV can really help sell yourself when looking for work or opportunities to study further. The University Careers Service can give you guidance on creating a good CV. You can meet with a member of the team, or use the fantastic online resources available to you. Top tips for CV writing from the Careers Service⁶ include:

- **Do your research**– A CV is only ever as good as it is relevant and tailored to your chosen field. Think about key skills and other requirements and how you match them.
- **Be selective**– Make sure you give relevant experience room and keep essentials (such as contact details) to a minimum.
- **Make it look good**– A well-presented CV ensures that recruiters find all relevant information quickly and easily.
- **Check it and get it checked**– It is your job to get rid of any spelling and grammatical errors. We will be happy to give you feedback on all other aspects of your CV.
- **Keep your CV up to date**, so you are always ready to apply for the next opportunity to come your way.



Our University expert Dr Joy Perkins says

“There is a lot of competition for internships and graduate jobs with employers often rejecting poorly prepared CVs. It is really worth spending time on developing your CV and using the Careers Service to help you perfect your CV.”

E-Portfolios

There are many experts at the University that can give you guidance on creating an e-portfolio, and the [Centre for Learning and Teaching have a guide on how to create one within MyAberdeen](#):

“MyAberdeen Portfolios offer a flexible and useful way to collect files together in one accessible and sharable place. They can be used to keep track of your progress and achievements, to provide a record of your course work, or to work towards specific goals.

You may want to create a Portfolio for each of your courses where you keep lecture notes, slides and assessments, or to create a personal Portfolio for your co-curricular activities.

You can choose to share Portfolios with both users inside the MyAberdeen environment and also people outside of MyAberdeen such as friends, family and prospective employers.”⁷

So, what should you include in your e-portfolio to help present your digital self and create a positive online presence?

⁶ University of Aberdeen, Careers Service CV help. (Accessed February 24, 2017) <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/careers/cv-applications-interviews/cvs.php>

⁷ Centre for Learning and Teaching. (Accessed February 24, 2017) <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/documents/e-portfolios.pdf>

Your e-portfolio could include any of the following:

- An up-to-date, employer-ready, professional, master CV.
- A writing sample, such as a research paper or comparative essay that highlights your writing style, analytical skills, and your ability to form a cohesive argument and defend it with effective and relevant evidence.
- Media content, such as, podcasts, videos, or presentations that show off your creative flair and technical capabilities.
- Photos of volunteer events you ran or participated in, or University clubs or societies you are a member of with a brief description.
- Reflections of previous projects, work experiences or learning activities, which demonstrate skills that you are acquiring.
- Scholarships, certificates of achievement or qualifications i.e.: Welcome Host, first aid, Duke of Edinburgh Award, etc.
- Anything else that you are proud of and shows that you're: professional, skilled, and hireable.
- Contact details. How do you want people to get in touch with you?

Another thing to consider when presenting your digital self, is *where* you want to position your e-portfolio. MyAberdeen could be extremely useful if you are applying for an academically related job or research position, but Deviant Art, for example, would be the ideal choice for a graphic artist. Research the field you will be working in and see what the current convention is. We have found some examples that you might find useful:

Behance

- Graphic design, web design, branding, illustration, architecture, fashion, photography, UX
- Showcase and discover the latest work from top online portfolios by creative professionals across industries.

SoundCloud

- Music, composition, sound production, sound effects
- SoundCloud is an online audio distribution platform based in Berlin, Germany, that enables its users to upload, record, promote, and share their originally-created sounds.

GrabCAD

- Engineering, product design, auto cad
- GrabCAD is a free cloud-based solution helping engineering teams share CAD files and promote their work.

LinkedIn

- All subjects and disciplines
- LinkedIn is mainly used for professional networking, including employers posting jobs and job seekers posting their CVs.