Swiss Information Literacy Standards

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Information literacy ranks among the most important key qualifications for success in study and profession in an information society. In higher education information literacy is primarily promoted by libraries which have, in recent years, expanded on their original offers of library launches and research courses to meet the optimal placement of skills for the information society.

The Swiss standards and the associated competency grid enable consistent placement and promotion of information literacy at the various universities. They provide guidance in the design of courses and course offerings and enable the development of compatible university cross-training concepts. These standards support the collaboration between library staff and faculty of various disciplines and facilitate agreements between libraries and university administration.

Elaboration of Swiss Standards

In recent decades, several different definitions of information literacy have been developed and discussed. An accepted definition today is that of UNESCO: «Information Literacy is the capacity of people to: Recognise their information needs; locate and evaluate the quality of information; store and retrieve information; make effective and ethical use of information; and apply information to create and communicate knowledge.» (Catts & Lau 2008).
This shows that information literacy can be understood as an interaction of different sub-competencies and various models of information literacy emphasize this aspect by presenting a procedural sequence of sub-competencies. Despite some wide-spread definitions there is however no generally accepted understanding of information literacy. Reasons for this are the interdisciplinary nature of the mediated skills as well as strong connections to neighbouring interdisciplinary skills such as media literacy.

With the UNESCO definition as a base the Swiss standards were developed using the «Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework» of the Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy ANZIIL (Bundy 2004) and the internationally established «Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education» of the American Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL 2000).

Studies of recent years have shown that information literacy must be fully understood and must not be restricted to the use of library tools (Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft 2011, Madray 2007). Specifically the aspects of «Use of Information» and «Responsibility to Information» have moved to the foreground and win academic importance. The inclusion of these aspects in existing concepts of information literacy was timely and included the development of six standards accordingly. Through the formulation of the new standards content could be simultaneously adjusted to the culture of the Swiss audience. Taking into account the three linguistic cultures (German, French, Italian) the developed concepts were limited to the essentials. Thus, the content for all three cultures remain understandable and experience a wider acceptance and implementation.

Competency Grid

Standards can be regarded as generally recognized objectives, which are formulated on an abstract level and describe an area of competence in few words. For teaching purposes, standards need to be supplemented by a more detailed description of skills required by specific target groups. With a modular grid including skills on three levels (beginner, advanced, expert) the necessary specifications for different environments were realized.

The level «Beginners» describes the skills needed for a first year student, while the level «Advanced» focuses on the skills needed for students at the transition from bachelor to masters. The «Expert» level is aimed at students who pursue further scientific work in research or industry. These are however purely cursory details. The competency grid is to be used in accordance with its modular design; the corresponding requirements may be, depending on the context, configured differently and may require different prioritization. The information literacy requirements for a student of jurisprudence are different to those of a student of electrical engineering.

Application of the Standards and the Competency Grid

The present Swiss standards for information literacy at Swiss universities are to be understood as a common basis for the recommendation and implementation of information literacy into the programs at universities. Each of the six standards includes three to four learning objectives that can be prepared and detailed in accordance with the technical requirements of the competency grid.

Subject-specific integration into study programmes and courses is essential for the successful placement and promotion of information literacy. The competency grid is a horizontally and vertically coordinated approach of broad objectives of the information literacy and can be directly used for the development of individual lessons or teaching modules and performance checks. The objectives contained in the competency grid can be utilized for making the course objectives. Since no subject-specific features are included in the competency grid, a technical adjustment is recommended. What levels of performance or competence are aimed at is determined by the department and by the type of university, the competency level (beginner, advanced, expert) can be mixed if necessary.

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Swiss Information Literacy Standards

Standard One | The information literate person recognises the need for information and determines the nature and extent of the information needed

Need | The information literate person

- defines and articulates the information need referring to a defined purpose

- understands the purpose, scope, and appropriateness of a variety of information sources

- selects and uses diverse sources of information to inform decisions

Standard Two | The information literate person finds needed information effectively and efficiently

Retrieval | The information literate person

- selects efficient methods or tools for finding information

- constructs and implements effective search strategies

- obtains information using appropriate methods

Standard Three | The information literate person critically evaluates information and the information seeking process

Assessment | The information literate person

- defines and applies criteria for evaluating information

- assesses the usefulness of the information obtained

- re-evaluates the nature and extent of the information need

- reflects on the information seeking process and revises search strategies as necessary

Standard Four

The information literate person manages and shares information collected or generated

Organisation | The information literate person

- records information selected and its sources
- organises, classifies, and stores information using appropriate methods
- shares information with others
- keeps up to date with information sources, information technologies, and investigative methods

Standard Five

The information literate person applies prior and new information to accomplish a specific purpose

Application | The information literate person

- applies new and prior information to the creation of new knowledge or a particular product
- communicates the new knowledge or product effectively to others
- revises the creation and communication process of knowledge or product

Standard Six

The information literate person acts as a responsible member of the information society

Responsibility | The information literate person

- acknowledges cultural, ethical, and socioeconomic issues related to the use of information
- conforms with conventions and etiquette related to the use of information
- legally obtains, stores, and disseminates all kinds of information

Information Literacy Competency Grid

Learning Outcomes	Beginner	Advanced	Expert
Need			
defines and articulates the information need referring to a defined purpose	recognizes and describes the current information needs	identifies and documents the information requirements for a defined task	determines the information needs for a defined project and developes a conceptual concept
understands the purpose, scope, and appropriateness of a variety of information	identifies various sources of information and describes the content	distinguishes the various sources of information according to orientation and scope	compares different sources of information regarding its suitability and appropriateness
selects and uses diverse sources of information to inform decisions	uses appropriate sources to meet the information need	makes a justified choice of information sources and uses them according to their suitability	makes a justified choice of appropriate information sources and uses them comparatively
Retrieval			
selects efficient methods or tools for finding information	uses various tools or methods for information retrieval	makes a justified choice of different tools or methods for information retrieval	makes a justified choice of tools or methods and uses them comparatively
constructs and implements effective search strategies	defines the bases of various search strategies and applies this	implements search strategies with the use of specific tools and documents this	provides a search plan according to the information need and documents the process and course
obtains information using appropriate methods	obtains information using local suggestions	uses different methods to obtain information and gives reasons for the process	evaluates several ways for efficient information retrieval, taking economic factors into account

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Information Literacy Competency Grid

Learning Outcomes	Beginner	Advanced	Expert
Assessment			
defines and applies criteria for evaluating information	evaluates information according to defined criteria	makes a justified choice of evaluation criteria and applies them	assesses the existing evaluation criteria and adjusts them as needed
assesses the usefulness of the information obtained	assesses the usefulness of information obtained in terms of relevance	assesses the usefulness of information obtained in terms of quality	assesses the usefulness of information obtained in terms of completeness
re-evaluates the nature and extent of the information need	decides whether additional information is necessary	determines the coverage of the information need and justifies the use of additional information sources	re-evaluates the nature and extent of the information need regularly and adjusts the concept accordingly
reflects on the information seeking process and revises search strategies as necessary	reviews the procedure and modifies the search strategies	reviews the procedure and compiles new search strategies as necessary	assesses the procedure and progress and revises the research plan
Organisation			
records information selected and its sources	records information and its sources with simple methods	records information and its sources digitally	records information and its sources with collaborative tools
organises, classifies, and stores information using appropriate methods	uses various methods for the organisation and storage of information	classifies information with appropriate methods	administers and updates information systematically and sustainably according to specific order criteria
shares information with others	shares information within a study group	shares information with the use of information technologies	uses collaborative networks for information exchange.
keeps up to date with information sources, information technologies, and investigative methods	keeps up to date with selected information sources	keeps up to date with the latest search methods	observes the development of information technologies and considers their usefulness

Information Literacy Competency Grid

Learning Outcomes	Beginner	Advanced	Expert
applies new and prior information to the creation of new knowledge or a particular product	integrates the new knowledge or product in a student project	integrates the new knowledge or product in a scientific project	integrates the new knowledge or product in a scientific publication
communicates the new knowledge or product effectively to others	communicates the new knowledge or product effectively within a study group	communicates the new knowledge or product with suitable means for specific target groups	discusses the new knowledge or product within a specialized community
revises the creation and communication process of knowledge or product	documents the creation of knowledge or product	analyses and assesses the creation and communication of knowledge or product	examines the effect of the scientific publication and optimises the process
acknowledges cultural, ethical, and socioeconomic issues related to the use of information	acknowledges ethical issues in a domestic cultural environment	acknowledges cultural and ethical issues in the international environment	acknowledges cultural, ethical, and socioeconomic issues in the international environment
conforms with conventions and etiquette related to the use of information	conforms with institutional conventions and rules of etiquette related to the use of information	conforms with specialist conventions and rules of etiquette related to the use of information	conforms with interdisciplinary and inter-national conventions and rules of etiquette related to the use of information
legally obtains, stores, and disseminates all kinds of information	knows the rules of citation and their legal basis	knows the basics of copyright law and applies them to information gathering and data storage	knows the basics of author's rights and follows them in the dissemination of information

Application (rows 1–3)

Responsibility (rows 4–6)