

## Information Literacy I

Ximena Gallardo C., English

One reader's review of bell hooks' *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004) criticizes the author for not supplying a bibliography at the end of her book because it hinders readers from easily finding the sources that hooks has excerpted. The same criticism could be raised against *An Inconvenient Truth*. For though the text includes an extensive "Acknowledgments" section, and a "Credits" section for its photographs and images towards the end, many of its assertions or predictions are not thoroughly documented.

For example, the calculation on pages 190-209 that the sea levels could raise up to 20 feet worldwide if enough of the ice shelf of East Antarctica or Greenland melted is based on general sources such as "two new studies in 2006" (190), the work on meltwater pools by Dr. Jim McCarthy of Harvard University (192), "scientists" who measured the amount of melting in Greenland in 1992, 2002, and 2005 (194-195), and a related quote by U.K. Science Advisor Sir David King (196).

Ironically, the lack of an extensive bibliography to back up the conclusions of *We Real Cool* and *An Inconvenient Truth* reveals that its respective authors have taken the role of "authority on the subject"; they, unlike our students, do not need to back their facts with bibliographies. They are the lecturers, we are the audience who have come to learn from them. And in the case of *An Inconvenient Truth*, a book based on decades of scientific work, the lack of an extensive bibliography also reveals that its author is trying very, very hard *not* to be intimidating, *not* to overrun the audience with the impact a full bibliography, index, or any other markers of "scholarly texts" would make.

Thus, *An Inconvenient Truth* is a perfect text for our students to practice finding the sources for the facts presented as, well, facts. Who are the authors of those "two new studies" from 2006 and what do the studies say, exactly? What is Jim McCarthy's area of expertise at Harvard University and how extensive is his knowledge of meltwater pools? Who are the "scientists" who measured the amount of melting in Greenland in 1992, 2002, and 2005, and are their findings reflected accurately by the drawing in pages 194-195?

The LaGuardia Library faculty has, for some time now, assigned a Narrative of Research paper that teaches students to record their search for sources and their findings, and to reflect on the research process. Likewise, my ENG 101 students write a Narrative of Research essay with an annotated bibliography before they begin to write their formal research paper. With a few modifications, this Narrative of Research can become an excellent fact-finding and writing exercise. Here, for instance, is a sample assignment for the argument about rising sea levels above:

**Instructions:** For this Narrative of Research paper, I would like you to explain in detail what steps you took to research the facts behind the contention on pages 190-209 of *An Inconvenient Truth* that the sea levels could raise up to 20 feet

worldwide if enough of the ice shelf of East Antarctica or Greenland melted. Your final draft should be a minimum of 500 words and include information on every one of the sections I list below.

### **Introduction**

Using your own words, summarize the argument made on pages 190-209.

### **Listing Facts**

Identify, as thoroughly as you can, the facts and sources that provide support to the argument on pages 109-209. The more details that you find and write down, the easier the next step will be.

### **Finding Information: Online Articles**

In this section, explain what steps you took to find digital articles on the facts/sources on your list, either in the library databases or in the free web. Name the search engines, databases, and the keywords you used, and the number of hits that each new set of keywords gave you. Explain what (if anything) in your search took you to a dead end, and what allowed you to find materials on your facts/sources. Finally, name which digital documents you chose as most useful and explain how/why they are useful.

### **Finding Information: Books and Print Journals**

In this section, explain what steps you took to find books and/or print journal articles that would provide further information on the facts/sources on your list. Name the search engines, databases, and the keywords you used, and the number of hits that each new set of keywords gave you. Explain what (if anything) in your search took you to a dead end, and what allowed you to find materials on your facts/sources. Finally, name which print documents you chose as most useful and explain how/why they are useful.

### **Conclusion**

Explain what you have learned about researching for facts/sources, what was interesting or fun to learn, and what you would do differently the next time.

## **Support Activities for the Narrative of Research**

- If the students are at a loss as to where to begin their research, suggest the area “Start Your Research” on this website.
- Since the assignment is designed to emphasize the process as much as the results, periodically discuss research techniques and possible solutions to dead-end searches with our students.
- One excellent resource to help students understand the steps to successfully locate and retrieve information are the CUNY Information Competency Tutorials. There is a link to these tutorials on the left-hand column of the LaGuardia Library Media Resources Center. => <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/library/> .

- Scheduling a library instruction session with a librarian may also help immensely (for a Library Instruction Request Form click here). => <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/library/forms/lmrc.htm>
- Constantly remind students to keep careful logs of their findings so that they will have plenty of information to write about for the final draft.
- If the class is putting together resources for a larger project of paper, you may want to assign a particular set of facts/sources to a particular group of students and have them report to the class.
- Whether students are working alone or in groups, I recommend that they check each other's logs and/or drafts of the paper frequently so that they can share ideas and strategies on finding information.