

Information Literacy II

Ximena Gallardo C., English

As one flips through *An Inconvenient Truth*, it becomes obvious that its aim is to communicate a multifaceted and complicated concept in terms plain enough that most audiences will understand its scope, impact, and urgency after one reading. Still, there are many ideas in *An Inconvenient Truth* that may not be crystal clear to all who read the book. For example, earlier this month a colleague queried me as to the exact difference between “global warming” and “greenhouse effect.”

There are many concepts used in, or connected to, *An Inconvenient Truth* that we may want to review with our students: acid rain, biodiversity, carbon footprint, carbon neutral, carbon offsets, disease vector, ecology/ecological, environment/environmentalism, extinction event, fossil-fuel emissions, greenhouse-gas emissions, pandemic, pollution, renewable energy (systems), sustainability, wilderness, etc.

The following terminology exercise can be easily completed in a computer lab. The goal is to familiarize students with a range of online reference databases and to compare and contrast the databases in terms of ease of use, extent of information, and readability. For this particular type of exercise, I recommend putting the students in groups of two or three, and assigning each member a specific task (browsing, reading, writing down answers, reporting to the class, etc.)

Look up the term “sustainability” in the following online databases:

Oxford English Dictionary

Oxford Reference Online

Gale Virtual Reference Science Collection, specifically in the *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change*

(These first three databases are located in the LaGuardia Library Media Resources Center => <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/library/> under Online Research Journals and Articles)

Bartleby.com

Wikipedia

(These last two databases are on the free web. You need a search engine such as Google to retrieve them)

As you browse through the answers, please answer the following questions for each database:

1. Was it easy to find a definition for your term?

Very easy Somewhat easy Not easy I could not find a definition

Comments: _____

(Note: in this section, students can explain what made the definition difficult to find, or what else they found instead of a clear definition).

2. How many results did your search bring up?

3. Read the definition, using the computer clock to time how long it takes you to read it. How long did it take to read the definition?

4. Is the definition easy to understand?

Very easy Somewhat easy Not easy I did not understand it

Comments: _____

(Note: in this section, students can explain what made the definition difficult or impossible to understand).

5. Does the definition include a list of references?

Yes No

6. Overall, would you use this definition in a research paper?

Yes No Only if I could not find a better one

Comments: _____

(Note: in this section, students can explain why they would use/not use this particular source in a research paper).

After students have analyzed each database, the class can use their findings to rank the databases or compare and contrast them according to the parameters specified by the list of questions.