

Anne Jumonville Graf

Consumers or Readers?

Exploring the Language of Information “Use”

In the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education,¹ information is consumed, evaluated, synthesized, and created. Students question, reflect, articulate, and seek. But nowhere are they named as “readers,” nor is “reading” specifically used to describe information literacy skills or abilities. While others have noted this absence,² it’s not hard to interpret many of the Framework’s knowledge practices as encompassing or referring to different types of reading. In this article, I would like to examine reading practices supported by the Framework and discuss benefits of recognizing reading more formally within discussions of information literacy teaching and learning.

Where Is Reading in the Framework?

A variety of reading skills are required to develop information literacy, such as the ability to decode, understand, and comprehend texts at multiple levels, as well as analyze, contextualize, and question texts and sources. Approaches to reading or “consuming” sources are also an area where expert and novice practices in specific contexts vary significantly.³ Different formats and environments inform a variety of reading preferences, behaviors, and choices.⁴ As a result, many types of reading, from skimming and scanning to more critical engagement, are required to engage in the abilities, actions, and understandings the Framework references.

Although all these reading skills are encompassed by *metaliteracy*, they may not be “read” as such by other scholars. Information literacy discussions end up siloed from other discussions of reading in higher education,⁵ limiting the potential of the Framework to function across disciplinary lines. Meanwhile, in Sophie Bury’s study of faculty views on information literacy, participants see academic reading and writing abilities as intertwined with information literacy development.⁶ Scholars in writing and composition studies, often with librarian collaborators, have long paid attention to the relationship between reading, writing, and research.⁷ With these connections in mind, I would like to explore how traditions of critical reading offer another way to view *information consumption* and *use*—terms that are present throughout the Framework.

Defining Reading in Context

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary includes eleven entries for uses of the verb “read,” ranging from receiving, comprehending, and understanding information to engaging in interpretive acts.⁸ Ellen C. Carillo, a composition scholar, defines *reading* on the latter end

Anne Jumonville Graf is associate professor and head of instruction services at Trinity University, email: ajumonvi@trinity.edu.

of this spectrum: “a deliberate intellectual practice that helps us make sense of—interpret—that which surrounds us.”⁹ As Carillo points out, this definition emphasizes a reflexive stance in which readers recognize not only how texts can shape our own understanding but also how our own understanding shapes our readings of texts.¹⁰ I like this broad definition of reading for a discussion of information literacy because it brings out the metacognitive lens essential to the Framework.

Carillo’s definition also bridges the sometimes-disparate traditions of critical reading explored by Karen Manarin, Miriam Carey, Melanie Rathburn, and Glen Ryland. According to Manarin and her coauthors, critical reading in the academic sense often includes skills such as distinguishing between main and supporting ideas, evaluating claims, and coming to view oneself—as a reader and as part of an academic community.¹¹ Critical reading for the purpose of social engagement, by contrast, emphasizes reading as a way of “questioning assumptions” and “recognizing power relations” for the sake of social engagement and change.¹² Both definitions require us to allow texts to read us—that is, question our own assumptions rather than solely question texts. I will next examine where and how the Framework connects this kind of reading to information literacy development.

Reading Practices Supported in the Framework

Readers of this essay will likely see academic and social traditions of critical reading in the Framework. For example, to understand the concept that Authority is Constructed and contextual, novices are encouraged to “critically examine all evidence.”¹³ Performing this type of examination uses different reading skills, ranging from skimming and scanning to critically evaluating source claims, which align with academic traditions of critical reading. Dispositions for this frame also draw from critical pedagogy as they encourage learners to “question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews.”¹⁴

In the Scholarship as Conversation frame, reading as a process of situating one source among others extends the contextualization of scholarly authority: to “recognize that a given scholarly work may not represent the only—or even the majority—perspective on the issue.”¹⁵ Importantly, this ability or choice rests on the reader’s metacognitive orientation to the task—that is, the disposition that a reader can or will “suspend judgment on the value of a particular piece of scholarship until the larger context for the scholarly conversation is better understood.”¹⁶ The ability to temporarily “suspend judgment” requires an understanding of one’s own presence as a reader, a reading practice in which social and academic approaches to critical reading overlap.

Sometimes the importance of reading to understand can be minimized in discussions of critical reading in order to focus on higher-order objectives, such as analysis or evaluation.¹⁷ But reading to understand is necessary for reading critically. Critical pedagogy advocate Stephen D. Brookfield writes about the importance of “understanding the text in the terms the author sets” before attempting to surface and critique the underlying assumptions of both reader and writer.¹⁸ In a chapter of Hannah Gascho Rempel and Rachel Hamelers’ *Teaching Critical Reading Skills: Strategies for Academic Librarians*, Elliott Kuecker makes a similar point: “Close reading requires a radical openness to the thing being encountered, a desire to listen to what it has to say on its own terms.”¹⁹ Here, in the context of critical reading traditions, close reading functions as a specific method of open-minded attention, described as “a desire

to listen.” This metacognitive work requires strategic open-mindedness to the perspectives of others. I argue that this perspective is not well captured by the language of “consuming” or “using” information. Mark Lenker references a workshop by Jane Hammons at Ohio State University that responds to this problem. Entitled “Voices Not Sources: Reframing How We Teach Searching for and Evaluating Sources,”²⁰ Hammons’s shift from “sources” to “voices” is a lovely way of invoking the act of reading as a form of listening.

In Research as Inquiry, novices may “monitor gathered information and assess for gaps or weaknesses” to “draw reasonable conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of information,”²¹ both of which rely on the ability to comprehend and evaluate the information present as well as what is missing. In a study comparing frameworks of information literacy and writing, Amy C. Rice, Dennis D. Cartwright, Lauren Hays, and Grace Veach’s librarian and writing instructor study participants noted similarities between the Research as Inquiry frame and the function of reading in frameworks from writing studies.²² From the composition perspective, reading is an element of research as inquiry that emphasizes comprehension, analysis, and synthesis in preparation for writing or other forms of knowledge production. Lenker echoes this approach in his consideration of the challenges of information synthesis, noting that synthesis involves the activities of comparing sources and noting silences or gaps.²³ This work relies on the reading skills of comprehension and analysis and frames reading as also listening for what is not said or who is not present.

From one perspective, all these examples underscore the close connections between the Framework and critical reading traditions. However, though these connections are evoked by the Frames themselves, they are less apparent in the language of information use and consumption. The Framework’s support of students as information producers and participants can, without careful attention, contribute to this tendency. As Brittney Johnson and I. Moriah McCracken note, “To help students understand the process of information creation, they must be engaged in assignments that position them first as consumers of information—those who must understand that these kinds of decisions were deliberately made by the original authors—and second as producers of information—those who determine what kind of information to create.”²⁴ If we name modes of information consumption as “reading,” we can use critical reading traditions to describe how consuming or using information is also about self-awareness, perspective-seeking, and, to return to Carillo’s phrase, the process of making sense of “that which surrounds us.”²⁵

Expert and Novice Reading Practices

Interestingly, the Framework’s disciplinary companion documents do speak explicitly to ways practitioners read to learn as well as learn how to read in a particular discourse community.^{26,27} These depictions of reading echo Miller’s examination of disciplinary information literacy practices, which also surfaced specific reading approaches as means of learning and participating in particular scholarly communities.²⁸ However, assessments of student reading for research assignments can tell a different story. In a study of students’ research assignments, Manarin et al. found that “asking students to find and use sources led them to do just that, not necessarily to read, understand, or synthesize them.”²⁹

Although information about student reading practices can be used to reinforce the “reading crisis trope,”³⁰ I do not intend this argument to function solely as a critique of student or “novice” reading practices. While many librarians would readily agree that they have

worked with students who have already written a thesis statement and are now in search of sources to support it,³¹ fewer would admit to the ways in which scholarly communication ecosystems, news, or social media drive us to similar behavior. We could ask ourselves: In which situations do we also “not” read—or read superficially? Where do we adopt a critical stance before seeking understanding? Do we suspend judgement in pursuit of understanding context? Complicating the picture of who reads what, how, and why might allow us to explore more reflexively some of the challenges of developing information literacy today.

Teaching Reading in the Library Classroom

Despite the omission in the Framework, librarians have written extensively about incorporating critical reading approaches,³² especially into activities like source selection³³ and source evaluation.³⁴ Lenker locates the value of information sources in students’ ability to determine how those sources have expanded their knowledge as information consumers (for example, readers). “Has this post on my go-to news site really left me better off? Have I changed my thinking because of reading this? Has it helped me grow as a person?”³⁵ The critically reflective nature of these questions positions reading as a means of understanding ourselves as well as the texts we encounter. Recognizing reading as an information literacy practice puts a greater spotlight on how we construct ourselves through our “use” and “consumption” of information.

Of course, the time it takes to read, and to read within the constraints of a teaching model like a one-time workshop, puts some structural constraints on reading instruction or opportunities to guide practice. That “reading takes time” may very well be a threshold concept for students, similar to Doug Downs’s claim that “Time is a threshold concept in writing.”³⁶ That it is difficult to “make time” for reading in library instruction classrooms can also serve as a reflexive moment that reveals how we signal the value and purpose of reading. Without practice and experience, it is harder to understand what is happening when reading and synthesizing are increasingly outsourced to generative artificial intelligence (AI) in what Olof Sundin describes as the shift from “searching for documents to searching for answers.”³⁷ This is not to reject those tools outright but to position ourselves and students to understand the significance of the work we are “saved” from doing by using them. As the Framework revision process continues, I suggest that the dispositions for Information has Value might gesture toward this understanding by naming the “skills, time, and effort” needed not only to produce but also to “consume” (for example, read) information sources. We show that we value information not only by producing it but also by how we consume it. ∞

Notes

1. Association of College & Research Libraries, “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,” February 2, 2015, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.

2. Tina S. Kazan, Nicholas N. Behm, and Peg Cook, “Writing Faculty and Librarians Collaborate: Mapping Successful Writing, Reading, and Information Literacy Practices for Students in a Post-Truth Era,” *Pedagogy* 21, no. 2 (2021): 311–28, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15314200-8811500>.

3. Karen Manarin, Miriam Carey, Melanie Rathburn, and Glen Ryland, *Critical Reading in Higher Education: Academic Goals and Social Engagement* (Indiana University Press, 2015), 88.

4. Yang Yang, Hamed Mohd Adnan, and Muhammad Naeem Javed, "Research Progress on Digital Reading Behavior: A Bibliometric Study," *Studies in Media and Communication* 13, no. 1 (2025): 393, <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v13i1.7179>.
5. Helen St. Clair-Thompson, Alison Graham, and Sara Marsham, "Exploring the Reading Practices of Undergraduate Students," *Education Inquiry* 9, no. 3 (2017): 284–98, doi:10.1080/20004508.2017.1380487; Hilde W. Afdal, Kari Spernes, and Reidun Hoff-Jensen, "Academic Reading as a Social Practice in Higher Education," *Higher Education* 85, no. 6 (2023): 1337–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00893-x>; Sally Baker et al., "The Invisibility of Academic Reading as Social Practice and Its Implications for Equity in Higher Education: A Scoping Study," *Higher Education Research & Development* 38, no. 1 (2018): 142–56, doi:10.1080/07294360.2018.1540554.
6. Sophie Bury, "Learning from Faculty Voices on Information Literacy: Opportunities and Challenges for Undergraduate Information Literacy Education," *Reference Services Review*, 44, no. 3 (2016): 245, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-11-2015-0047>.
7. Heidi L. M. Jacobs, "Information Literacy and Reflective Pedagogical Praxis," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 34, no. 3 (2008): 256–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2008.03.009>; Toni M. Carter and Todd Aldridge, "The Collision of Two Lexicons: Librarians, Composition Instructors and the Vocabulary of Source Evaluation," *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* 11, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.18438/B89K8F>; Jerry Stinnett and Marcia Rapchak, "Research, Writing, and Writer/Reader Exigence: Literate Practice as the Overlap of Information Literacy and Writing Studies Threshold Concepts," *Literacy in Composition Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.21623/1.6.1.4>; Chengyuan Yu and Cecilia Guanfang Zhao, "Continuing the Dialogue between Writing Experts and Academic Librarians: A Conceptual Model of Information-Based Academic Writing in Higher Education," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 6 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2021.102454>.
8. *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "read," accessed October 8, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/read>.
9. Ellen C. Carillo, *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer* (Utah State University Press, 2015), 6.
10. Carillo, *Securing a Place for Reading*, 6.
11. Manarin et al., *Critical Reading in Higher Education*, 4.
12. Manarin et al., *Critical Reading in Higher Education*, 7.
13. Association of College & Research Libraries, 4.
14. Association of College & Research Libraries, 4.
15. Association of College & Research Libraries, 8.
16. Association of College & Research Libraries, 8.
17. Manarin et al., *Critical Reading in Higher Education*, 94.
18. Stephen D. Brookfield, *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 136.
19. Elliott Kuecker, "Framing Reading as a Method in the Humanities," in *Teaching Critical Reading Skills: Strategies for Academic Librarians*, ed. Hanna Gascho Rempel and Rachel Hamelers (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2023), 66.
20. Mark Lenker, "Thoughts on Synthesizing Information: A Research Skill for Our Time?" *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 25, no. 3 (2025): 444, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pla.2025.a964599>.

21. Association of College & Research Libraries, 7.
22. Amy C. Rice, Dennis D. Cartwright, Lauren Hays, and Grace Veach, "Speaking the Same Language: A Phenomenological Study Investigating Librarian and Writing Instructor Shared Frameworks in First-Year Writing Courses," *College & Research Libraries* 86, no. 2 (2025): 313-324, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.86.2.307>.
23. Lenker, "Thoughts on Synthesizing Information," 442.
24. Brittney Johnson and I. Moriah McCracken, "Reading for Integration, Identifying Complementary Threshold Concepts: The ACRL Framework in Conversation with Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies," *Communications in Information Literacy* 10, no. 2 (2016): 192, [10.15760/comminfolit.2016.10.2.23](https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2016.10.2.23)
25. Carillo, *Securing a Place for Reading*, 6.
26. *Companion Document to the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*, American Library Association, August 1, 2022, https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/acrl/content/standards/Framework_Companion_STEM.pdf; *Companion Document to the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Sociology*, American Library Association, January 27, 2022, https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/acrl/content/standards/framework_companion_sociology.pdf; *Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Research Competencies in Writing and Literature*, American Library Association, November 9, 2021, https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/acrl/content/standards/framework_companion_LES.pdf; *Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Politics, Policy, and International Relations*, American Library Association, June 24, 2021, https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/acrl/content/standards/Framework_Companion_PPIR.pdf; *Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Instruction for Educators*, American Library Association, June 2023, https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/acrl/content/standards/Framework_Companion_Instruction_Educators.pdf.
27. Association of College & Research Libraries, "Framework for Visual Literacy in Higher Education," April 6, 2022, <https://acrl.libguides.com/IRIG/frameworkforvisualliteracy>.
28. Sara D. Miller, "Diving Deep: Reflective Questions for Identifying Tacit Disciplinary Information Literacy Knowledge Practices, Dispositions, and Values through the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 44, no. 3 (2018): 412-18, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2018.02.014>.
29. Manarin et al., *Critical Reading in Higher Education*, 94.
30. Karen Manarin, "Why Read?" *Higher Education Research & Development* 38, no. 1 (2019): 11-23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1527296>.
31. Anne-Marie Deitering and Sara Jameson, "Step by Step through the Scholarly Conversation: A Collaborative Library/Writing Faculty Project to Embed Information Literacy and Promote Critical Thinking in First Year Composition at Oregon State University," in *Critical Thinking Within the Library Program*, ed. John Spencer and Christopher Millson-Martula (Routledge, 2009).
32. Hannah Gascho Rempel and Rachel Hamelers, eds., *Teaching Critical Reading Skills: Strategies for Academic Librarians* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2023).
33. Iris Jastram, Claudia Peterson, and Emily Scharf, "Source Evaluation: Supporting Undergraduate Student Research Development," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (Oct 2021). <https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2021/source-evaluation/>.

34. Alyssa Russo et al., “Strategic Source Evaluation: Addressing the Container Conundrum,” *Reference Services Review* 47, no. 3 (2019): 294–313, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-04-2019-0024>.
35. Mark Lenker, “Developmentalism: Learning as the Basis for Evaluating Information,” *portal: Libraries & the Academy* 17, no. 4 (2017): 729. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2017.0043>.
36. Doug Downs, “‘Time Is a Threshold Concept in Writing’: Expanding Access to Undergraduate Research by Mentoring for Threshold Concepts and Self-Concept,” *College English* 84, no. 6 (2022): 613–37, <https://doi.org/10.58680/ce202231992>.
37. Olof Sundin, “Theorising Notions of Searching, (Re)sources and Evaluation in the Light of Generative AI,” *Information Research an International Electronic Journal* 30 CoLIS (2025): 295, <https://doi.org/10.47989/ir30CoLIS52258>.