

Sara D. Miller, Leslie Ross, and Kay P. Maye

## The Framework's Next Chapter

An Interview with ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education Review and Revision Task Force Leaders Sara Miller and Leslie Ross

**A**CRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Framework) seeks to establish core principles and dispositions for critically engaging with information in its various forms. Following its introduction in 2000, the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education underwent multiple revisions to address the changing nature of information and the ever-expanding role of academic instruction librarians, culminating in the adoption of the Framework in 2016. Although ACRL standards, guidelines, and frameworks are typically reviewed every five years, in 2023, the ACRL Board of Directors requested a joint working group consisting of members of the ACRL Instruction Section (IS) and the ACRL Student Learning and Information Literacy Committee (SLILC) to review and revise the Framework. The Board was particularly interested in a review focused on ensuring that current trends, theories, and approaches, such as Generative artificial intelligence (AI), are pedagogically aligned with the Framework's principles and dispositions. The working group, led by Amanda Folk and Nicole Pagowsky, began the review process with the help of fellow working group members and comments from the academic instruction librarian community.

The working group initially planned for a two-year process—one year for review and one year for revision. The current working group leaders, Sara Miller and Leslie Ross, are continuing this deliberate review and revision process to ensure that findings and recommendations are appropriately addressed. Kay P. Maye, a member of SLILC and one of the co-leads for the group's publications team, recently asked Miller and Ross about their experience leading the group. Check out the conversation:

**Kay P. Maye (KM):** What is your experience using the Framework in your work as a library instructor?

**Sara Miller (SM):** In my work, the Framework serves as a structure that underlies both my teaching and my work with course instructors. In teaching, the language of the Framework mainly provides clarification for concepts and a way to organize ideas that I have taught for many years. I use the Framework directly and frequently in my work with course instructors in exploring ways to design workshops and curricula. The frames provide ways for instructors to make concepts explicit that are often nebulous, both in their own varied

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experiences and that of students. It helps them to explore and clarify what exactly it is they are hoping students will learn.

**Leslie Ross (LR):** I have been using the Framework to inform and support information literacy instruction since it was officially adopted by ACRL in January 2016 (actually, a little before!). At that time, I had been teaching information literacy in the context of credit-bearing courses and one-shots for ten years. I was blown away by the idea of a Framework supported by threshold concepts, knowledge practices, and learner dispositions. The standards were excellent, but the Framework allowed a deeper dive into the student information literacy learning process and offered insights beyond surface-level skills, which was very exciting. At New Mexico State University, the core curriculum and course learning outcomes for our three-credit information literacy class are mapped to the Framework. We are currently working on creating a concepts-based menu for our one-shot workshop request form to help disciplinary faculty see the connections between library skills and Information literacy instruction.

**KM:** What aspects of the Framework have you found easy to teach? Which is more difficult?

**SM:** I find authority to be the most natural fit for a way into critically evaluating sources. Approaching authority not as an absolute but as variable and contextual and taking many different forms is key to thinking about where a source comes from, what its purpose may be, and what uses it might have. Research as Inquiry fits well with a common assignment in our First-Year Writing curriculum, in which students look at sources from their discipline in order to form questions, not to find facts. I find the least frequent frame that I touch on is Information Has Value, unless I am working with a class that is looking specifically at voice and representation in information. In those situations, I tend to draw from a combination of the Information Creation as a Process and Information Has Value frames.

**LR:** The first thing that springs to mind are the practical aspects of Searching as Strategic Exploration. I teach credit-bearing courses as well as one-shot workshops and cover some aspects of search every single time. In one-shots, I find the students very often have been taught where to find databases in the library's web environment but not how to construct search strings or use field searching and other tools to find the best sources. Twice now I have had a student shake my hand after class and say, "Thanks for telling me about Boolean operators." In credit-bearing courses, we have the time to cover the more abstract aspects of searching, like algorithmic awareness, and incorporating global and critical perspectives. I would say the frame I reference the least would be Information Creation as a Process. I think this is a difficult threshold concept to teach because the sheer amount of information a college student encounters on a day-to-day basis makes it difficult to categorize.

**KM:** What are some common misconceptions of the Framework?

**SM:** I feel the most common misconceptions are that we have to "teach it," as in explicitly verbalize the concepts to students, or that it needs to fit naturally into existing systems of assessment. Threshold concepts, by their nature, are something that need to be worked toward through practice, challenging ideas, and repeated encounters. It is difficult to assess

them as they are not just understandings or something to memorize but represent habits of mind which develop over time.

**LR:** I'm thinking back to when the Framework was first rolled out and the resistance it faced from some in the library community. Certainly change is hard and that played a part, but I think there was also a perception that the Framework was too complex and that it was difficult to "implement." I still hear that from time to time. I see that as a misconception because the Framework itself doesn't require implementation more than the standards did. For me, the threshold concepts represent points of access to mastery in information literacy—doors that a student needs to pass through conceptually to understand information literacy at its deepest levels. To me, it is more a map providing direction and not a tool to be implemented.

**KM:** What inspired you to join the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education Review and Revision Task Force?

**SM:** The Framework has been the single most impactful document in my professional life since its debut. Its explicit definitions of the underlying values and concepts of information literacy (IL) have paved the way for the field of information literacy to explore into the humanistic, affective, ethical, and personal aspects of IL learning more deeply. I jumped at the chance to have a hand in its revision and to strengthen those underlying concepts to help guide us in wherever the world of information is headed.

**LR:** I mentioned in question one that I began consulting the Framework and using it to structure my credit-bearing information literacy course before it was officially accepted by the ACRL. That's how excited I was about it. The standards were excellent, but they primarily focused on competencies and measurable skills. A student can mimic a competency or skill without understanding the underlying concepts. The Framework allows me to look beyond the skill or competency to knowledge practices and learner dispositions, which provides a broader view of the learning process. To participate in the revision of such an important foundational document of the library profession represents a critical career goal for me.

**KM:** Describe the review and revision process. Is there a particular focus or does the group conduct a full review and revision?

**SM:** The group is conducting a full review and revision, which in turn has pointed out some areas of focus. We spent the first year gathering feedback through a survey, focus groups, and literature review, which helped us frame areas of attention and possible revision. While we have found that the Framework and its theoretical underpinnings have largely held up over time—and that the document does not need a complete rewrite from the ground up—we have found that there are some issues with clarity and questions about where issues such as AI and emerging technologies, critical practice, sustainability, and civil discourse fit in. We are working on those questions during the revision process.

**LR:** We are a large group with sixteen members, but still the work has been formidable. We are doing a deep read of the Framework fortified by the data we have collected from so many interested parties in the field. We are finding areas to update as the information

ecosystem has changed over the ten years since the Framework's inception, but we are also finding that, at its core, the Framework is robust and remains relevant today and will continue to be applicable well into the future.

**KM:** How are recent advances in technology and pedagogy being incorporated into the current Framework revision? How do you envision the Framework evolving to meet future educational needs?

**SM:** The conversations around AI literacy, and potential models for it, are still evolving alongside AI itself. Since the Framework is a group of threshold concepts and ideas that underpin information literacy as a whole, it is not proscriptive about specific pedagogical techniques or geared toward specific technologies. At this juncture, the concepts expressed in the Framework still seem to provide enough context for framing and informing an IL-based exploration of technologies like AI. If AI evolves in the future in such a way that it necessitates recognizing a new IL learning threshold, the Framework should provide a sufficient structure to add one. Currently we are adding references and examples of things like AI and critical/reflective pedagogies into the existing Framework language, including in the dispositions and knowledge practices, to provide contextual suggestions for librarians to consider in their work.

**LR:** It is no surprise that AI has come up again and again in our conversations and in the data we have collected, as well as the topics of critical librarianship and sustainability. Even though the framework is extensible, the group feels at this point that pedagogies and emerging technologies impact our work and certainly impact student learning, but the journey toward those competencies passes through the existing threshold concepts. We added a section on information literacy instruction in the current higher education environment to our first revision draft to address these subjects.

**Kay:** How can librarians not involved in the review process share their views on the Framework?

**SM and LR:** While our initial data-gathering phase is done, we will be sharing our draft revisions out through several channels this spring and seeking feedback from the community before we submit a final revision. All library perspectives and expertise are invaluable to this process, and we want to ensure every voice is heard and all views are considered. Be on the lookout for announcements for ways to participate!

To learn more about the history of the Framework and the current review and revision process, please visit:

Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education – Appendix 2: Background of the Framework Development, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframeworkapps-appendix2>.

ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education Review and Revision Task Force, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/committees/acrl-framework-information-literacy-higher-education-review-and-revision-task-force>. *zz*