Information universe

1. Introduction

When you are looking for information, you should try to keep in mind why you need it, in other words, what the purpose of the information you are looking for is. For example, do you need it for teaching, or for writing a report for work, or perhaps to keep up with recent developments, or because you want to make an informed decision about a purchase?

Having a clear purpose in mind will help you to concentrate on the most appropriate types of resources that will provide you with information you need.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity, you should know why it is important to be clear about the intended purpose of the information you are looking for.

2. Categories of information

These categories will help you to focus on the type of information you should be looking for:

News or current information

What's the latest on X?

Ideas and opinions

What do people think about X?

Research results

What does the latest research tell us about X?

Theoretical analysis/theory

What are the different theoretical perspectives on X?

Facts and figures

How many cases of X were there last year?

History or background

When did X start? What happened?

People's experience

What is it like to suffer from X? What is it like to use Y service?

Persuasion

Is the information trying to persuade you to buy something, think something, or do something?

3. Types of information

Let's imagine that you are looking for information on mobile phones. On this section we will have a look at

- different purposes you might have in mind for finding the information
- types of information you could search, for each of the different purposes

As you go through our suggestions, consider if you would add any more types of information you could also search, for each of the different purposes.

Buy a new mobile phone

Types of information you could use:

- people's experiences
- news and current information
- persuasion

Find out when mobile phones first appeared and what they looked like

Types of information you could use:

- history or background
- people's experiences

Find out how many mobile phones were sold in the UK last year

Types of information you could use:

- facts and figures

Learn about the possible health risks associated with mobile phones

Types of information you could use:

- research results
- news and current information

4. Your information universe

You can find the category of information you are looking for in many different places. Indeed, any of the categories of information we just had a look at might be found in the places listed below.

Below are listed different places and examples of information you might find there. The list of examples of information given for each of the places is not exhaustive. It is intended to give a flavour of the range of information sources available to you, many of which you probably use already.

You, as a source of information

For ideas and opinions, start with your own.

For research results, have a look at any you have collected yourself.

For experience, think about your own.

Your workplace, college or university

For news, refer to noticeboards, meetings, emails and news sources available through the library.

For ideas and opinions refer to colleagues and discussion groups.

For research results look at journal articles available through the library.

For theoretical information look in books and articles available through the library.

For facts and figures, refer to the relevant department, or look through any information systems you have access to.

For historical information, look at notes, records and archives.

For experience, refer to colleagues, clients and customers.

Your local community

For news, read newspapers, watch television, or listen to the radio.

For ideas and opinions, refer to your local media and local community groups.

For research results or theoretical information, look in books and articles available through the public library.

For facts and figures, look at relevant databases available through your local library, ask the local council, or refer to the government statistical service.

For historical information, refer to the archives of local organisations, the local press, or specialist websites.

For experience, visit the websites of local support groups, read blogs or join social media groups.

National and international

For news, refer to the media (newspapers, TV, radio) or the specialist press.

For ideas and opinions, refer to polls, market research, conferences and social media.

For research results, read journal articles available Open Access or through the public library.

For theoretical information read books and journal articles available Open Access or through the public library.

For facts and figures, refer to relevant databases available through the public library, to the government statistical service or other government websites.

For historical information, refer to the records office, online historical newspaper archives available through the public library, or specialist websites.

For experience, visit the websites of national support groups, read blogs or join social media groups .

5. Summary

Summary

In order to find the most appropriate types of information for your requirements, you need to be focused on what it is you are looking for.

Think carefully about:

- the type of information you are looking for - the category
- why you want the information - the purpose
- the best place to go to find the category of information you are looking for.

Planning this in advance of your search will save you time and ensure that you find the most appropriate content.