Book Review: Information Now: A Graphic Guide to Student Research

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By Matt Upson, C. Michael Hall, & Kevin Cannon

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In this guide that is styled as a comic, authors and illustrators Matt Upson, C. Michael Hall, and Kevin Cannon introduce new college students to information literacy concepts that will serve them in both their academic careers and their everyday lives. The authors have coupled a conversational tone with their informal, graphic style, and they have succeeded in presenting a book that feels easy for students to approach and understand. Chapters run between 10 and 15 pages in length, each addressing a different aspect of the research process, and the book flows in a very linear fashion. The authors begin by discussing the ubiquitous access to information that many individuals now perceive as being available to them, and go on to explore how information is organized, retrieved, and evaluated; the importance of ethical information use is also addressed.

The authors indicate in the book's preface that they decided to style this text as a comic in order to communicate most effectively the included concepts: "Because comics stimulate the parts of your brain that handle visual elements as well as the parts that handle language, they can potentially give your brain more opportunities to connect with the content than you'd have with a strictly text-based book" (p. VII). While some readers may feel that they need to adjust gradually to this format, the comic-book style succeeds in making the content accessible, saves readers from paragraphs of dense text, sets the book apart, and has the potential to hold particular appeal for undergraduates who might otherwise be less inclined to engage with the content.

Perhaps one of the book's greatest strengths is the inclusion of critical thinking questions at the end of each chapter. Librarians or instructors might assign these questions to students as pre-class work, in order to set the stage for more advanced, in-class discussions of the research process. The questions also align nicely with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* (2015) and its emphasis on critical thinking and inquiry.

Information Now is divided into seven chapters, each detailing a different aspect of student engagement with information. The opening chapter discusses information overload, provides historical context for contemporary information explosion, and establishes a foundation for both the remainder of the book and the importance of students developing the skills needed to assess information effectively. The following chapter explores the contemporary research process. While the authors suggest that students use Google and Wikipedia to retrieve initial, background information, they emphasize that researchers must properly evaluate the information that they find and verify the cited sources.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore how information is organized and where to find it, and address library catalogs, journals, and databases. The authors treat the Dewey Decimal System, Library of Congress Subject Headings, and metadata in some detail and perhaps more than is relevant for current students working in an increasingly digital information environment. These chapters also provide guidance on creating search strategies and using library catalog and database functions (e.g. controlled vocabularies, Boolean operators, filters, and truncation) for effective searching. Librarians who are used to addressing catalogs and databases in one-shot instruction sessions will be pleased to see all of the best, basic search tips covered in the book's compact, easy-to-follow format.

No introduction to research would be complete without discussion of web searching and source evaluation, and the authors of *Information Now* oblige. The chapter "Searching the Open Web" compares and contrasts the web and library resources, even delving into discussion of deep web content (such as that behind logins or paywalls). In this chapter, the authors again point to Wikipedia as a helpful starting point for research, going so far as to suggest that researchers who encounter inaccurate entries consider their freedom and responsibility to correct errors. This discussion transitions nicely into chapter 6, which explores the evaluation of information. Included are discussion of the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose) test, and questions that a researcher should ask about a source in order to determine relevance and validity. The authors also suggest that students consider how their research questions align with, and may appropriately influence, their choice of information sources.

The book closes with the chapter "Using Information Ethically," a lengthy tour of plagiarism, citation, and copyright. The authors successfully define and discuss plagiarism and how to avoid it, but without overwhelming the reader. This chapter is thorough;

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students will not be left wondering why or how to attribute their sources. The chapter concludes with a discussion of copyright and fair use, but unfortunately the authors do not address either in relation to student work or authorship.

Each of the book's chapters takes less than 20 minutes to read, and while the authors scaffold the book's content from beginning to end, each chapter can stand alone. *Information Now* includes humor and multi-disciplinary examples throughout. Amusing comments and graphics run the spectrum from a bit snarky to a bit silly, offering something for every reader. *Information Now* provides a friendly entry into academic research for undergraduates in any discipline.

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References

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