Providing Information

Introduction

Libraries provide information. It is important for you to understand what is meant by information, what constitutes good information, and which organisations provide it.

To work effectively with information, you need to be able to identify its characteristics, and be aware of all the sources of information available to you and to clients.

When you have completed this section, you should be able to

• identify the characteristics of good and poor information

• describe a range of information providers, including their names, roles, user groups, and services.

The main topics in this section are:

1. What is information?
2. Good information
3. Poor information
4. Quality of information
5. Sources of information
6. Information providers

What is information? •1

The word information is used in many ways. It refers to what is communicated, as well as the communication itself.

Here is the definition from The Macquarie Dictionary.

Information [phonetic spelling] n. 1. knowledge communicated or received concerning some fact or circumstance; news. 2. knowledge on various subjects, however acquired. 3. the act of informing. 4. the state of being informed.

Good information •2

Good information must meet the need of the person seeking it. It should be:

Relevant: It must relate to the question being asked, or the topic being investigated.

Timely: It must be available when the client needs it.

Up-to-date: It must be recent enough to meet the client’s need today.

Accurate and complete: It must not contain errors, or leave out important parts.

Clear: It must be understandable to the client.
Concise: It should be no more than the client needs.

**Poor information** •3

Poor information does not meet the need of the client. It may be:

- **Irrelevant**: It may be on a different aspect of the enquiry, or on another topic.
- **Out-of-date**: It may be so old as to be no longer correct.
- **Inaccurate or incomplete**: It may contain errors, or leave out important parts.
- **Unclear**: It may be too complicated for the client to understand.
- **Too much**: It may be more than is needed, and may confuse or overwhelm the client.

**Sources of information** •5

Information is derived from many sources. They can be grouped into:

- **Primary sources**: These are where the information is created - e.g., personal papers, diaries, letters, recording an interview. For example, Captain Cook’s *Endeavour* journal (>http://www.nla.gov.au/pub/endeavour/mantran/manu01.html)

- **Secondary sources**: These comment on events, discoveries etc. - e.g., textbooks, encyclopaedias, yearbooks, articles in a periodical. For example, Richard Hough’s *Captain James Cook: a biography*

- **Tertiary sources**: These are used to track existing information - e.g., indexes and abstracts, catalogues, bibliographies. For example, M.K. Beddie’s *Bibliography of Captain James Cook, R.N., F.R.S., circumnavigator*

**Information providers** •6

Many organisations provide information. They include:

- Libraries
- Archives
- Museums
- Community information agencies
- Tourist information centres
- Registries
- Records management units
- Government departments and shopfronts
- Consulates, embassies, high commissions
• Community information and referral services

Some libraries provide information to the whole Australian community. Others meet the information needs of an organisation, including educational, community and corporate institutions. There are also combinations of library types, such as a public-school library. These are called joint-use libraries.