Contributed Column: ITAL &

Prompting Critical Thinkers

Using Library Frameworks to Teach AI Literacy as a Workforce Skill

Anna Clymer

"AI literacy" would be my pick for buzzword of the year. Employers are saying it, university administrations are saying it, faculty are saying it, and librarians are saying it. Hardly a week goes by without some heated debate about what it means to be AI literate and whose responsibility it is to teach these skills. Generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude, Gemini Notebook and so many others are readily available to students, and recent graduates are being asked to address skills related to generative AI in job interviews and entry-level roles. Librarians are uniquely positioned to provide their expertise when it comes to navigating generative AI as an information landscape because we already teach students to evaluate information, question authority, and use information ethically.

This case study follows the evolution of a business librarian's one-shot instruction session from "what is generative AI" into a more sophisticated lesson teaching AI literacy as a workforce skill, grounded in information literacy frameworks. Through a multi-semester iteration process, the lesson became less about defining generative AI and more about how to navigate generative AI as an information source and think critically about when and how to use AI tools to support both academic and professional work.

There has yet to be consensus on what it means to be AI literate. Because academia and employers have varying definitions of AI literacy, the work of business librarians occupies an interesting space. Leo Lo defines AI literacy for academic libraries as "the ability to understand, use, and think critically about AI technologies and their impact on society, ethics, and everyday life."[1] Robin Ryan, writing for *Forbes*, states that AI literacy "refers to the basic understanding of how artificial intelligence works, as well as how to use AI tools effectively and ethically in the workplace."[2] These definitions share common elements like the ethical use of AI tools, but they also differ in emphasis. Lo's definition specifically names critical thinking as a component of AI literacy and considers how AI technologies impact society, while the *Forbes* definition centers on understanding how artificial intelligence tools work. The workforce definition is more functional, whereas the academic definition is broader and situates AI use within a larger information environment. As a Business and Entrepreneurship Librarian, I strive to teach within the academic definition of AI literacy and keep information literacy skills at the forefront of my lessons, but it's important to remember that students entering the workforce need to be able to articulate their skills to employers. Academic librarians are positioned to bridge the two definitions of AI literacy because information literacy already covers information evaluation, authority, and ethical use. Librarians can further support workforce definitions of AI literacy by including information on how generative AI tools work and by making a strong connection between information literacy skills and generative AI use. This case study gives one example of how to integrate information and AI literacy into library instruction.

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In spring 2025, I was asked to visit a graduate-level marketing class, provide an overview of generative AI, and cover some common tools that marketing students might encounter. My first attempt at this lesson plan was very practical. I included overviews of common AI tools, prompt engineering, citing generative AI, and best practice tips. I also shared additional resources for learning about AI and building skills like prompt engineering. I thought about what students needed to know when using generative AI for their coursework, but I did not connect generative AI explicitly to information literacy principles. As a result, that lesson felt disconnected from my role as a subject librarian in the research and instruction department, though I was glad to take the opportunity to connect with students and faculty on a topic they requested. When I was asked to come back the following semester, I wanted to be more thoughtful about how I talked about generative AI as part of the information landscape more broadly.

My second pass at this lesson, in summer 2025, was similar to the first, but I added more depth to the information on prompt engineering. I added Lo's CLEAR Framework for prompt engineering to give students a tangible example of prompt writing and to demonstrate Research as Inquiry.[3] My goal was to introduce the idea of iterative questioning and prompting. I wanted students to understand that by writing better prompts and asking better questions, they would get more relevant information and outputs. I also tied the idea of prompt engineering to basic research skills, explaining to students that research questions might evolve over time and that your first search is rarely your best search.

The third iteration of this lesson plan, in fall 2025, was directly rooted in the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*.[4] It was important to me to connect what I was teaching to information literacy principles and provide more information on why these skills were relevant not only to this course, but also beyond it. As my thinking shifted from teaching generative AI tools, I began to consider that the framework already gives us a model to teach AI literacy. Librarians have already been teaching the underlying skills of searching for and evaluating information. Generative AI provides an avenue to reintroduce and expand on these topics in a new context. The three frames I focused on for the lesson were Scholarship as Conversation, Authority Is Constructed and Contextual, and Research as Inquiry.

I introduced Scholarship as Conversation in connection with students being critical of generative AI responses. As ACRL outlines in this frame, Scholarship as Conversation revolves around the idea that typical research inquiries don't have a definite answer. I wanted to stress to students that they should be wary of the way generative AI tools confidently state answers and flatten nuance into a single final answer rather than an idea or area to be explored and discussed. Instead of treating a generative AI output as an exact answer, I encouraged students to consider the AI tool as a launching point to dive deeper into the scholarly conversation. I asked them to think about how they would verify the information provided.

Our conversation then flowed naturally into the next frame, Authority Is Constructed and Contextual. Generative AI tools condense large amounts of information into a polished output, but that can be dangerous to students who then trust that as authoritative. ACRL outlines in this frame that "Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility."[5] In the case of generative AI tools, authority is obscured, and that makes it more difficult for students to parse through information that is reliable and helpful for their information needs. My questions to students leaned more heavily on the idea that authority is constructed, and generative AI makes it even more difficult to understand exactly where the information provided came from. How could we tell if the answer provided by the AI tool was pulling from expert information or low-quality

sources? To strengthen this point, I also added examples of generative AI lawsuits and copyright battles in the news to highlight authority and ethical use of information. These additions helped to shift the focus of the lesson towards teaching students how to think more critically about AI-generated information. Anecdotally, the discussion was richer and more engaging in this iteration. The law cases, in particular, drew a lot of questions and interest from students.

Finally, I drew on the frame Research as Inquiry, which I felt was the easiest to demonstrate through the lens of prompt engineering. "Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field."[6] The more revisions and iterations, the more students work through their own information needs. So rather than focusing on how to write a better prompt, I walked students through adding context and narrowing their research questions. I positioned prompt engineering as a mini version of the research cycle; the first prompt is not usually the best, just as a first pass at research and searching is not usually the best.

In addition to building my lesson around the ACRL Framework, I also started the final iteration by explaining what I was personally doing to learn about generative AI. At the time, I was participating in and completing an ACRL e-course, Exploring AI with Critical Information Literacy. I felt it was important to start with letting students know where I was in terms of understanding and expertise, because modeling lifelong learning is an important part of my teaching philosophy. I also wanted to highlight that, because generative AI is evolving so rapidly, it takes effort to stay up to date on current trends and events. The third and final iteration of this lesson plan combined my own expertise in information literacy with skills being requested by employers.

Through the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), Mary Gatta reported earlier this year that the demand for AI skills in entry-level workers has risen dramatically even in just the past few months.[7] Gatta also reports that the top three AI-related skills employers are looking for are the ability to identify and use AI tools appropriate for specific tasks, develop effective prompts, and analyze and revise outputs.[8] All three of these skills are related to and can be taught through the lens of information literacy. Rather than attempt to teach these skills as isolated AI competencies, librarians can incorporate them into existing information literacy practices. Our students will be stronger information users if they can transfer information literacy skills into practical contexts. Evaluating which AI tool would be most useful in solving a problem or completing a task strengthens critical thinking skills, and students get practice articulating their information needs. Developing effective prompts allows generative AI users to practice iterative questioning and showcases the value in revising a search or prompt. Analyzing and revising outputs connects with source evaluation and authority and requires students to consider how the information was created and can be verified. In the first stages of this lesson plan, I had been thinking about information literacy, AI literacy, and workforce preparation independently. However, as I iterated this class presentation, I realized they are closely related and reinforce each other.

The lesson here for librarians is that teaching AI tools, skills, or literacy will likely continue to be a large part of the work as employers keep requesting AI skills for new employees. However, this is a great conversation starter and entry point for information literacy skills, which we already teach students. Generative AI gives librarians an opportunity to reaffirm the relevance of information literacy in a new information landscape. My ultimate goal is not to produce students who simply know how to use generative AI tools but rather to help students become critical thinkers who evaluate, question, and ethically use information regardless of how technology changes.

Generative AI allows me to continue working to develop students who can think critically and evaluate information from any source, whether it uses generative AI or not. The generative AI tools students use in the classroom and in the workforce will continue to evolve rapidly, but the foundational skills in information literacy will also continue to be relevant.

ENDNOTES

[1] Leo S. Lo, "AI Literacy: A Guide for Academic Libraries," *College & Research Libraries News* 86, no. 3 (2025): 120, https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.86.3.120.

[2] Robin Ryan, "AI Literacy Is the #1 Skill Employers Want in 2025," Careers, *Forbes*, July 30, 2025, https://www.forbes.com/sites/robinryan/2025/07/30/the-no-1-skill-employers-want-in-2025-and-most-job-seekers-dont-list-it/.

[3] Leo S. Lo, "The CLEAR Path: A Framework for Enhancing Information Literacy through Prompt Engineering," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 49, no. 4 (2023): 102720, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2023.102720.

[4] "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

[5] "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education."

[6] "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education."

[7] Mary Gatta, "Demand for AI Skills in Entry-Level Jobs Nearly Triples Since Fall 2025," National Association of Colleges and Employers, April 20, 2026, https://www.naceweb.org/job-market/trends-and-predictions/9fbe8e04-10ad-415a-a004-c6f199012362.

[8] Gatta, "Demand for AI Skills."