



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

**INSTRUCTIONAL AREA: *Managing Family Life***

**Tierra de Oportunidad - Module 14**

**Using Information Resources**

**Overview**

In the United States, it is necessary to routinely and confidently use information resources to function successfully in either the workplace or in daily living. Successful use of information resources does not require special skills as much as it does a positive attitude, flexibility, and a recognition that everyone, irrespective of educational level, learns how to find out new kinds of information by trial and error.

Information can come from many sources -- one's friends and family, co-workers, neighbors, salespeople, telephone hotlines, calls to businesses, public agencies, or information centers, newspapers, manuals, instruction booklets, pamphlets, billboards, radio, television, videocassettes, and via keyboard access to computerized databases -- some as simple as automated teller machines, some as complex as in science fiction movies.. Contemporary literacy requires the ability to access information in many different ways, the ability to assess the accuracy and objectivity of the information, and the ability to put the information to use in one's own situation.

Upward career advancement now and in the 21st century will not require that a worker have a great store of specific information but, rather, the ability to rapidly and efficiently access and assimilate new information. A crucial part of accessing new information is knowing when and how to question teachers, instructors, presenters, salespeople, and other information-providers. Part of the questioning process includes asking questions which make it easier to effectively use the information being provided -- the ability to engage in interactive dialogue.

Our society is so firmly based on information transactions that it will be essential for almost all adults to not only know how to access information but to actually enjoy the process of acquiring new information and ongoing learning -- even when the person accesses new information simply because they are curious.

**Basic Skills Development**

<i>Listening and Speaking Skills:</i>	Eliciting information, receiving, interpreting and responding to verbal information, securing clarification, confirming information.
<i>Information Skills:</i>	Acquiring, evaluating, organizing, maintaining, and interpreting information; using computers to process such information.

<i>Technology Skills:</i>	Selecting and using appropriate technology: voice mail, index cards, menu-based systems, keyboard familiarity.
<i>Analysis and Problem-Solving:</i>	Awareness of possible sources of bias in information, evaluating reliability of information, extrapolating from limited information, applying general information to individual circumstances.

## Teaching Points

1. **Information from friends, co-workers, and family members is extremely valuable but may not always be accurate.** People always bring their own interpretation to information so that second-hand information is not always accurate. Those interpretations are usually conditioned by their own hopes, expectations, and experience. People may often believe they heard what they wanted to hear or they may believe they heard what they didn't want to hear -- and be mistaken.
2. **It is always safest to compare information from different sources and confirm information before acting on it** -- whether the information comes from a friend, a family member, a co-worker, or even from an "official" or formal information source. It makes sense to take a lot of care in confirming information which is important to one (e.g. information on immigration law, on wages and working conditions, on terms of credit) even if it takes extra effort and time.
3. **No one should be embarrassed to ask an information-giver to clarify and explain what they are saying.** People who deal with specialized information every day -- social service agency staff, health care personnel, teachers, legal advisors often use a kind of shorthand or jargon in talking which is confusing to people of all educational levels. This is usually not their fault (although sometimes people deliberately make the information they provide obscure). The reasonable response is to ask for clarification. It is helpful to the information-giver if a person can explain what part of the information was confusing -- e.g. when someone asks, "Please explain again the part about the process for adjusting the mortgage interest rate", "Where do I send my application?".
4. **It is seldom possible to get all the information one needs.** Thus it is necessary to extrapolate from limited information. We all need to generalize from limited information. Particularly in dealing with bureaucracies, it is not safe to extrapolate. I can assume from my limited experience that most legal papers need to be notarized but I might waste a lot of money notarizing applications which simply need to be signed. After extrapolating from limited information, it is especially important to try and confirm that one's explanation is right.
5. **Even printed "official" information is not always reliable.** Even when there is printed official information which seems clear, it is useful, to the extent possible, to check its accuracy and reliability. Some information which may be literally accurate may, nonetheless, be misleading.
6. **There is so much information now that much of it is indexed.** Indexes take many forms but all indexes classify information under different headings -- the most familiar example being information about the author, title, subject, and call number of a book. More and more jobs require workers to be good at using specialized indexes (e.g. make, model, and year of a car part). Often information-providers ask their customers to furnish information which allows them to find the data they need or to prove a person should have access to information (e.g. social security number). In personal

transactions, telephone transactions, voice mail transactions, and computer-based transactions, it is common to use an index -- often called a "menu" (since restaurant menus are indexes of kinds of food, for example).

7. **There is so much information now that it is necessary for most people to use some kind of "information center" for many of their needs.** The phone book has very thorough listings of many kinds of information resources for every area -- not just in the yellow pages but, also, in the front of the phone book. Now, most public agencies supplement the information they provide by phone with pamphlets, handbooks, and brochures. Using an information center is almost always the best first step to accessing information.
8. **A great deal of information is now provided in the form of charts, graphs, and tables.** Feeling at home with these graphic modes of representing information is a crucial part of both work life and personal life.
9. **Information from many agencies and institutions now requires information-seekers to use voice-mail.** Using a voice-mail system frustrates most people but it is useful to remember that most systems have a choice which is "none of the above" which brings a real, live, human being onto the telephone line to respond.
10. **Accessing information at work will increasingly require use of computer-based menus.** Using computer-based information systems does not require that a person know how to type but it does require a positive attitude about keyboards. Computer-based learning systems are now mostly menu-driven and demonstrate how crucial it will be in the future to access information via a keyboard. ATMs (Automatic Teller Machines) are a good example of a simple computer-based menu.
11. **Asking questions at work is evidence of a person's desire to get ahead.** People often do not ask questions because they are afraid of being considered stupid. In fact, the usual way in which ambitious workers show their motivation, intelligence, and commitment to a job is to ask intelligent questions (many of which they spend some time formulating to allow them to "show off" their skills). Asking questions is evidence of a commitment to quality in most jobs. Not asking questions is taken as evidence of indifference and laziness.
12. **"Browsing", acquiring information just for curiosity's sake, is valuable practice for later acquiring information in a systematic way.** Literacy involves not only the skill and ability to acquire information but, also, the habit of acquiring information. Learner's values must develop to encompass "idle" information searches which have no immediate value but as a means of building on-going practice in accessing information outside of a formal learning environment.

## **SAMPLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

1. Research various modes of transportation around town and around the state. Read airline and bus schedules. Apply for bus passes.
2. Use the white pages of the telephone book to locate local, county, state and federal service agencies. Call a public agency for information. Locate offices of assembly persons and state senators. Use the yellow pages of the telephone book to locate information on house repairs, furniture, restaurants, entertainment locations.
3. Visit a Health Clinic and gather information regarding immunizations, pre-natal care, nutrition, etc. Call local Parks and Recreation or YMCA and gather information on

activities for children and adults. Visit the Police Department and inquire how to report a crime.

4. Use the newspaper to locate articles about local, national or international conflicts, analyze the reasons for the conflict based on the news report, identify the factions involved, identify the goals of the factions. Review the weather report, locate the major cities listed on a map, prepare a graph showing the temperature of ten major cities. Locate the classified section, find the average selling price for five household items.
5. Visit a drug store, read the labels of aspirin, cold remedies, nasal sprays, sleeping tablets, diet pills. List the dosage, the directions and the dangers if not used properly. List the advantages and disadvantages of the medication.
6. Surf the Internet, find the Homepage of your city. List the mayor and the council members. Find demographic information about your county. See if there is a history of the city, school information, programs for youngsters, or a list of places to visit.

## **RESOURCES**

### ***Examples of Information Resources***

#### **Daily Newspaper**

Tabular information -- Business and Sports sections

Graphic information -- news stories on polls, weather, movie theater schedules.

#### **Other Print**

Flow charts -- Mechanics manuals, instruction cards

Telephone book -- yellow pages, white pages, 800 directory,

Indexes -- Library card catalogue, store catalogues, manuals, specialized directories, phone book, classified ads, Spanish-English dictionary, TV Guide.

#### **Hotlines**

CIRRS -- Immigrant Assistance Line (415) 554-2444

#### **Radio**

Call-in shows -- clarification, comparison

Public affairs shows -- comparison

#### **Television**

"911" -- TV docudrama on oral/aural information exchange

Local/national news -- graphic information

Distance Learning Education

#### **Information Centers**

CHIRLA -- Speakers Bureau (213) 736-1300 X631 ( full spectrum of immigrant issues)

Local library, reference librarian

Local office EDD (Employment Development Department)

Family Planning -- local Public Health Department

#### **Voice Mail**

Guia del Campesino (800) 232-4842 -- i.e. 232-GUIA.

(Great number to call for phone menu with many information choices.)

### ***Background on Information Economy and the Future***

SCANS -- **What Work Requires of Schools**, Superintendent of Documents

Fax orders to (202) 512-2250. Can be charged to credit card.

Anthony P. Carnevale, **America and the New Economy**, ASTD (American Society for Training and Development), 1991.

This is the long awaited, final report on a 5-year research and development project conducted jointly by the U.S. Department of Labor and ASTD. Its intent is to integrate current business and economic literature with firsthand exploration of the nation's workplaces to provide a road map to competitive success in the new global economy. Significant findings include: The single minded focus on the competitive productivity standard has been supplanted by a new set of competitive standards, including quality, variety, customization, convenience, and time.

Anthony P. Carnevale, Leila J. Gainer, and Ann S. Meltzer, **Workplace Basics: The Essential Skills Employers Want**, ASTD (American Society for Training and Development) and Jossey-Bass, 1990.

Because of increased global competition, shifting technologies, learner management systems, and emphasis on quality and service, basic skills for American workers have expanded to include among other skills: communication, adaptability, developmental skills, group effectiveness, influencing skills, and the most fundamental skill of all, learning how to learn. In this comprehensive book, the authors explain the basic workplace skills and detail how each affects job performance in various occupations.

ASTD (American Society for Training and Development), can be found online:  
**[www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org)**

Adult Education Institute for Research and Planning, **State Plan for Workplace Learning**, 1992. Order by phone from (916) 448-9063.

## **ESL Commercial Textbooks**

- Essential Lifeskills Series: What You Need to Know About . . . , National Textbook Company

Reading Labels, Directions & Newspapers:  
Section 3, Reading Newspapers

Reading Ads, Reference Materials & Legal Documents:  
Section 3, Reference Skills

Reading Signs, Directories, Schedules, Maps, Charts & Utility Bills  
Section 1, Using Directories  
Section 2, Special Reading Skills

- Graph Attack! Understanding Charts and Graphs, Cambridge Adult Education, Prentice Hall Regents  
Chapter 9, Seeing Is (Not Always) Believing

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