

Margy MacMillan

# Open résumé

## Magic words for assessment

**I**-SKILLS Résumé is a tool developed to encourage students to reflect on and assess their information fluency. Like many institutions, Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, has a very successful information fluency program—we think. We are very good at developing course- and program-integrated instruction sessions, but are struggling with the assessment piece. As our instruction is developed for particular courses, each student's experience of library instruction is unique, a situation that does not lend itself to broad, homogeneous testing.<sup>1</sup>

Like many ideas, I-SKILLS Résumé has many “parents.” The tool has come about from an unlikely mix of an ice-breaker at a conference, my own interests in reflection and articulation in learning, institutional pressure to prove we are doing what we say we are, and the college-wide outcomes initiative for curriculum renewal at Mount Royal. Like many tools, I-SKILLS Résumé has developed a life of its own—the more we use it, the more ways we discover to use it.

In the two years that I have used I-SKILLS Résumé, it has proven to be a useful resource that gathers intriguing information. I have showcased it at an on-campus professional development institute<sup>2</sup> and spoken informally about it at several library conferences. Having received some interest and approval, I would now like to set the idea free to the wider academic library community, in the hopes that other librarians may find it equally useful.

### The genealogy of an idea

My quest for an assessment tool really began

when Mount Royal College adopted an outcomes-based initiative for curriculum renewal in 1997.<sup>3</sup> As part of the team developing the “Information Retrieval and Evaluation Outcome,” I began looking at ways of assessing information fluency. Reviewing the literature and seeing various models available on the Web of how other libraries were dealing with the issue was informative, but a little dispiriting. The majority of available models involved multiple-choice questions, in pretests and post-tests, most of which focused on fairly mechanistic aspects of information fluency and didn't seem to provide much benefit to the student. The following example is a composite of the kinds of questions I did not think were very helpful, but found all too often:

If you're looking for facts and statistics, start by:

- a) checking the reference collection
- b) asking a librarian
- c) searching the Web

To which the answer, I guess, is “Yes.”

I had other misgivings about this kind of assessment, particularly when used as a pretest. There was a disturbing undercurrent in discussions with colleagues and in conference presentations that went something like this: “If students do poorly in a pretest, they will pay more attention to me during the class.” This seemed to run directly counter to the other emerging trend in library instruction research: the importance of self-efficacy.<sup>4</sup>

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If, during their first encounter with library instruction, students do poorly on a pretest, that cannot enhance the students' confidence in their abilities. The negative effect may be compounded by badly designed tests that assess a student's understanding of library jargon rather than his or her ability to search for information. I did find well-designed multiple-choice tests, but that kind of test did not seem to provide the kind of useful, authentic assessment I was looking for.

About the same time, I was working with two instructors, Maureen Mitchell from the nursing department and Sondra Corff from biology, on the problem of how to promote reflection as part of learning. Our concern was that in "high-content" courses, students rarely had the time or opportunity to reflect on what they knew except under the extreme pressure of an exam. To misquote, with apologies, *1066 and All That*,<sup>5</sup> information fluency ". . . is not what you thought. *It is what you can remember.*"

We also discussed the importance of having students articulate what they learned as a way of encouraging reflection and metacognition. Such self-awareness of learning could enhance self-efficacy and I wanted to find some way of encouraging reflection and articulation as part of the college's information fluency programs.

### **An idea is born**

If the necessity for assessing college outcomes was the mother of my invention, the father was certainly an ice-breaking activity at a session given by Kathy Enger at LOEX-of-the West in 2002. At the start of her preconference workshop "Problem-Based Learning in Higher Education: Active Student Engagement in the Learning Process," she had us form groups and write a group résumé, with the usual categories, such as education, experience, expertise, interests, etc.

The ice-breaker was successful on a number of levels: it used a familiar format that required minimal explanation; it started us off on a very positive note—who doesn't

like to talk about themselves?; and best of all, it gave me a really interesting idea!

What if I asked students to develop individual résumés, but focused only on their information skills? In writing the résumé they would be encouraged to reflect on and articulate what they could do; the students would use their own words to describe their skills, removing the jargon problem; the students, in describing what they could do, rather than struggling with questions they couldn't answer, would have a more positive experience with concomitant self-efficacy benefits; and most importantly, they'd have a document they may be able to use in developing professional résumés and portfolios. The I-SKILLS Résumé was born! Like many projects, the acronym came first, and what it stands for came later. Its full title, seen only on very formal occasions, is *Information Skills and Knowledge Inventory for Lifelong Learning Success*.

I realize that while I-SKILLS Résumé fulfills several purposes, such as reflection and articulation, I have not discovered a panacea that conclusively or objectively assesses either a student's information fluency or the efficacy of our programs. In conducting an ongoing literature review, I am less convinced than ever that such objective evaluation is possible, given that I cannot ever have a real control group. There are too many confounding factors in our diverse student body, and it would be ethically difficult and practically impossible to deprive one set of students of all library instruction while another set taking the same course received help. Similarly, statistical analysis of what students identify as skills will be interesting but inconclusive, given that students may not always be accurately describing what they can do.

I have begun a research project in which students have the opportunity to build their résumés over the course of a three-year program. This may satisfy some assessment requirements, such as showing students' perceptions of the growth of their skills. It may also provide some insight into our instruction, as the students I am studying participate in a comprehensive program of

information fluency sessions. Objective assessment aside, the tool has already proven to be easy-to-use, students have commented on how writing things down helped them think about what they knew how to do, and the résumés have provided some interesting insights into how students think about their information fluency.

### **I-SKILLS Résumé goes to college**

At Mount Royal, I have used I-SKILLS Résumé in a variety of contexts, as have my colleagues, both librarians and nonlibrarians. Most formally, it is part of a research project designed to observe journalism students' perceptions of their information skills over time. I have also used it with advanced public relations students working on group projects. Before meeting with me for project-specific research assistance, each group fills out a single I-SKILLS Résumé together. As our meetings start, I use it as a way of determining what instruction I need to focus on with each group, and can also ask particular members of the group to demonstrate skills they've identified as their strengths to the others.

### **The research project<sup>6</sup>**

Before using I-SKILLS Résumé as a tool, like any good librarian, I did an extensive search of the literature. I did not find anything really comparable, which meant that a) it had never been done, b) the people doing it didn't have time to write about it, or c) it was too simple to work. I'm inclined towards "b" as the correct answer, so if anyone else is using a focused résumé tool to encourage students to write about their information fluency skills, please let me know. I would love to compare notes.

In order to motivate myself to actually try the idea on live students, I undertook a research project. My application for ethical approval states a variety of reasons for doing the research, but I am really conducting the project to satisfy my own curiosity around two main questions. Is the tool useful to students, librarians, and others? What infor-

mation skills do students have and how do they describe them?

The research project focuses on students in the journalism program for a variety of reasons. First and foremost is an extremely generous colleague, Terry Field, chair of journalism in the Centre for Communication Studies. Field is a member of the Information Retrieval and Evaluation Outcome Team and feels that students in his program can benefit from I-SKILLS Résumé, both to assess their academic skills and as part of their professional preparation. Journalism as a profession requires advanced research skills, and we have a course-integrated, incremental suite of instruction sessions throughout the program.

Another advantage to using this group of students is that most take the same path through the program, so there will be pre-defined points at which to complete a résumé. The résumé is currently an assignment in a first-year course, a second-year course, and a final professional preparation course. Students can incorporate information from their I-SKILLS Résumés into their professional portfolios.

While the assignments are required, participation in the research project is not. Only those students who sign a consent form are part of the research project. I keep electronic copies of the résumés and send them back to students for updates when the assignments are due. For the research project, I'll be doing this until 2007, at which time I will have two whole cohorts of students to analyze.

Initial results of the research project are promising. Students do seem to understand the format easily and the provision of an example seems to give them ideas about what they might list as information skills without unduly leading or constraining them. The résumés I have received so far show an interesting range of skills and ways of describing them. Résumés from second-year students show a growth in skills, and those students have commented on how updating their résumés prompted reflection on their development as information users.

### Sample I-SKILLS Résumé

(Information Skills and Knowledge for Lifelong Learning Success)

A blank version of I-SKILLS Résumé is available online at  
[www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/~mmacmillan/research/iskillblank.doc](http://www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/~mmacmillan/research/iskillblank.doc)

**Personal:** (Name, Course, Semester) I. B. Profen, Chemistry 3351, Winter 2003

**Special expertise:** (What kinds of information or topics are you especially adept at finding/evaluating/using?)

- expert at finding government chemical research information on the Web, and
- adept at using databases to find articles from scholarly journals.

**Education:** (What classes, training, reading, self teaching etc. have you done in the area of information skills)

- library sessions for the following courses:
  - CHEM 2201—using databases and the Web
  - CHEM 2203—using print sources
  - CHEM 3350—using environmental print and Web sources
  - CHEM 3351—using production print and Web sources
  - BIOL 2231—using library resources, Web evaluation
  - ENGL 2201—using library resources;
- in-house workshop, “Finding and using data on hazardous chemicals,” during summer employment at Dupont; and
- subscribe to “Researchbuzz,” an e-mail alerting service on information resources.

**Experience:** (What types of information can you find and what tools can you use—e.g., article databases, library catalogs, deep Web sites, laws, addresses, etc.)

- experienced with online catalogs for MRC, University of Lethbridge, and Lethbridge Public Library;
- expert user of ProQuest, Academic Search Premier, for locating articles;
- familiar with using Interlibrary Loan services to get information from other libraries;
- expert at retrieving MSDS and other hazard information from the Web;
- familiar with standard print tools for Chemistry including *CRC Handbook*, *Encyclopedia of Chemical Technology*, Merck Index;
- familiar with Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) Web site and resources;
- adept at using search engines on government sites to extract maximum information from federal and provincial departments; and
- can locate legal materials related to chemistry.

**Other:** (Anything else pertaining to your information-finding/evaluating/usage skills you'd like an employer to know, e.g., citing/analysing/bias checking?)

- familiar with documenting sources in APA and MLA formats, and
- adept at evaluating Web sites for authority and currency.

## The résumé leaves the nest

I would like to formally launch I-SKILLS Résumé into the academic library community. In its current form it is ready to be adapted to whatever use readers may find for it. It would be great to hear from readers who like the idea of setting up a site to share the tool's permutations and possibilities.

## Acknowledgements

This tool has been developed and refined with the help of colleagues inside of the library and out, at the college and elsewhere. At Mount Royal College, I would like in particular to thank the Library Instruction Team for their patience with my enthusiasm, the Information Retrieval and Evaluation Outcome Team and the Faculty Curriculum Group for their support of my research project, and the students, staff, and faculty of the Journalism Department of the Centre for Communication Studies, especially Chair Terry Field. Thanks are also due to Kathy Enger for supplying the ice-breaker that led to I-SKILLS Résumé; to Helen Clarke at the University of Calgary for reviewing my research; and to Donald MacMillan, also of the University of Calgary, for his support and ideas.

## Notes

1. Mount Royal College Library's instruction program is delivered by eight librarians to a student population of 11,000. We enjoy tremendous support from nonlibrarian faculty, and our work is integrated at the course and program level. For more information, please see the annual report at [library.mtroyal.ca/services/instruction/](http://library.mtroyal.ca/services/instruction/).

2. The presentation, which formed the basis of this article, can be found at <http://www2.mtroyal.ca/~mmacmillan/conf/tli.htm>.

3. For more information about the curriculum renewal initiative at Mount Royal College, please visit [www.mtroyal.ca/cr/](http://www.mtroyal.ca/cr/).

4. Elizabeth A. Linnrebrink and Paul R. Pintrich, "The role of self-efficacy beliefs in student engagement and learning in the classroom," *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 19, #2 (April 2003):119-38.

5. W. C. Sellars and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (E.P. Dutton and Company, 1931).

6. For extensive information about the research project, including a working bibliography and ethics approval form, see [www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/~mmacmillan/research.htm](http://www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/~mmacmillan/research.htm). *~*

## IF (Information Fluency) \*

If you can teach your class when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you  
If you can trust instructors not to doubt you  
And still reach out despite their doubting too

If you can plan and not get tired by planning  
To implement the perfect credit course  
Or teach class after class, the hours spanning  
And yet not lose your steam, nor sound too  
hoarse

If you can dream that students soon will master  
The vagaries of searching this and that  
If you can meet with triumph and disaster  
Of sessions that succeed or fall quite flat

If you can bear to see the search you've given  
Mangled by knaves so that it finds no jewels  
And watch the boolean logic string get riven  
And stoop to teach them once again the rules

If you can watch them mix their ands and ors up  
Or put quotations 'round a single word  
If you can show them SGML markup  
Without being thought of as a total nerd

If you can do your stats, reports and budget  
While keeping up with classes and research  
Resisting all temptation to just fudge it  
And leave your dean/director in the lurch

If you can fill the one-shot fifty minute  
With a good two hours worth of info lit  
Yours is the class and everything that's in it  
And—for today at least—you've done your  
bit!

\* With profound and profuse apologies to Rudyard Kipling