# Introduction:  What it Means to Be an
# Information Literate Historian

**Information Literacy and Scholarship for the Twenty first Century Student**

Because you are reading this book, it's anticipated that you are embarking on your first *major* history-related research project.  You've probably done research for history classes before; the standard 10 page paper with 5-7 sources and maybe a primary source or two.  Now you are faced with a larger project in which you must take a core of primary source material, learn what other historians have said about your subject and mold it into a meaningful project that includes insightful analysis.  You must begin to behave like a professional historian.  Only, you haven't been practicing this craft for many years!  So, this book is here to help you think about your project in both traditional and untraditional ways.

One of the key features of this book is to help you become information literate.  Information Literacy is the buzzword of the moment in education.  Broadly, it means the ability to recognize when and what information is needed as well as to locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information.[1]  With the quantity and variety of information that exists today, book, journal article,

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[1] For a fuller statement of Information Literacy, see:  Association of College and Research Libraries. **Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.**
http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ACRL/Standards_and_Guidelines/Information_Literacy_Competency_Standards_for_Higher_Education.htm

website, television news, etc., it has become increasingly more complicated to discern reliable information from deceptive and inaccurate information. Your research challenge is even more difficult that of your professors at your age and station of life. The discipline of history presents a special case because, unlike many of the scientific disciplines, it has roots in the more traditional sources, that is print resources as well as the newer modes of information dissemination, such as website and other electronic methods of information production. So you as a researcher, must be familiar with both ways of conduction research and using resources.

**Where this book will take you and How it is different from other books like it.**

To put it simply, this book attempts to teach you the search strategies and sources that a librarian would teach you and couple them with new methods of research production, namely websites. Increasingly information is not just found on the Internet, but students and faculty are choosing to make their research available on the Internet. There are other books that will teach you about the traditional methods of researching in books and journals, finding primary sources and then how to use those traditional sources to produce a lengthy research paper. This book, however, will provide:

> ➢ Questions to ask before, during and after your research process as
> well as questions to ask of your sources and their authors.

➢ Search strategies that can be used both in electronic indexes and in ferreting out sources.  It will discuss what types of sources are appropriate for what types of research questions, especially when the Internet is the best source and when it's not.

➢ Information about finding and using books, journals and primary sources, the building blocks of your research.  You will be able to find books and journal articles quickly and efficiently, as well as be able to select the best ones for your topic.  This book will discuss what is and is not available on the Internet and why.

➢ Discussions on how historians practice their craft and the nature of historical discourse.  Conducting advanced research is taking part in this discourse.

➢ Guidelines for designing a website.  Historical discourse and scholarship on the Internet, while still consisting of research and documentation has a different structure than a traditional paper.  A poorly constructed website will send users away, not to mention earn a poor grade.  This book will not teach HTML, the code which websites are made of, nor will it detail graphic design techniques such as the use of the program *Photoshop*.  However, it will suggest how to organize your website to make a credible, analytical contribution to the field of history and to your topic.  It will also suggest, when applicable, software that you can learn to use to create your website.

> ➢ Information about the integration of extras in your website, such
> as maps, audio and images.  Why have a website if you cannot
> integrate something besides text?

Research in the twenty first century has become complicated and you must rise to meet that complexity.  Shoddy research will only lead to poor and embarrassing conclusions.  To be an Information literate historian, you must learn to use all of the resources available efficiently and effectively.