

EDUCATION AND INFORMATION LITERACY

An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*

Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. Education and information literacy¹ are fundamental to the mission of libraries of all types and form the foundation of intellectual freedom. Libraries provide access to information and ideas through their facilities, resources, and services. Libraries foster the ability to use those resources through educational programs and instruction.

The value and importance of intellectual freedom and its relationship to education is widely recognized in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” adopted by the United Nations in 1948. These principles align closely with the American Library Association’s *Library Bill of Rights*.

The importance of intellectual freedom is expressed in both documents, and the necessity of education to the development of intellectual freedom is specifically discussed in Article 26 of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial, or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.²

The *Library Bill of Rights* “affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas,” making them resources for facilitating education, encouraging curiosity, seeking knowledge, and further expanding the principles of intellectual freedom.

Access to information reflecting a variety of viewpoints is listed as the first principle in Article I:

Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

Article II of the *Library Bill of Rights* emphasizes the importance of fostering access to information by providing resources that allow users to evaluate content and context, and to find information representing multiple viewpoints:

Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

Libraries and library workers foster education and lifelong learning by promoting free expression and facilitating the exchange of ideas among users.³ Libraries use resources, programming, and services to strengthen access to information and thus build a foundation of intellectual freedom. In their roles as educators, library workers create an environment that nurtures intellectual freedom in all library resources and services by doing the following:

- developing collections and services representative of multiple perspectives that empower individuals to explore broadly when pursuing their own interests
- providing programming through a variety of formats that accommodates multiple methods of learning and expands opportunities to discover, respond to, and create ideas
- leading instruction framed around information literacy skills and critical thinking
- supporting the development of skills necessary to effectively evaluate the accuracy of content and identify false or misleading information
- advocating for the appreciation of diverse voices and using the library to explore unfamiliar or controversial concepts

Through engaging in these educational services, libraries encourage individuals to explore ideas; discover, access, and evaluate information; draw meaning from information presented in a variety of formats; develop valid conclusions; and express new ideas. By offering these services, libraries facilitate access to information and offer a path to a robust appreciation of intellectual freedom rights and the value of libraries as cornerstones of education in the communities they serve.

¹ “Evaluating Information: Information Literacy,” American Library Association, March 18, 2019. “To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” — ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, January 10, 1989

² “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” Article 26, United Nations General Assembly, December 10, 1948.

³ “The Universal Right to Free Expression: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*,” adopted January 16, 1991, by the ALA Council; amended on July 1, 2014. “Freedom of expression is an inalienable human right and the foundation for self-government. Freedom of expression encompasses the freedoms of speech, press, religion, assembly, and association, and the corollary right to receive information without interference and without compromising personal privacy.”

Adopted July 15, 2009, by the ALA Council under previous name "Importance of Education to Intellectual Freedom"; amended July 1, 2014 *under previous name* "Advocating for Intellectual Freedom"; and June 25, 2019.