

University Libraries, Virginia Tech

Background Knowledge Probe

Addison

- Have never heard of this.
- Have heard of this but don't really know how to use it.
- Have some idea of how to use it, but not too well.
- Have a clear idea of how to use it and have some experience with it.

ILLIAD

- Have never heard of this
- Have heard of this but don't know how it is used
- Have some idea how it is used, but I've never used it
- Have a clear idea of how to use it and have some experience with it.

College Librarian

- Have never heard of this person.
- Have heard of this person but I don't really know who he or she is.
- Have some idea of this person but have had no contact with him/her
- Have a clear idea of who this person is.
- Have a clear idea of who this person is and have had contact with him/her

Information Literacy

- Have never heard of this concept.
- Have heard this phrase but don't really know what it means
- Have some idea of what it means but not too clear
- Have a clear idea of this idea of what this is and can explain

Usage Notes:

A background knowledge probe is a simple questionnaire to measure students' familiarity with concepts or items the teacher wishes students to learn. In response to each item, the probe directs students to indicate their degree of familiarity. On the first day of class, before giving the Background Knowledge Probe, the instructor should emphasize that this is not a test and it will not be graded, but that the answers will help library instructors to learn about what students come into class knowing and not knowing. To underscore this point, students are told not to write their names on the probes. One professor used this kind of thing with fifty historical items and fifteen minutes to complete the assessment. Obviously, in a library instruction setting we'd take less time with fewer items to be assessed.

The professor used these as a way to assess prior knowledge, to follow up with a structured group activity capitalizing on group memory where students who did have knowledge of historical concepts and facts were able to help those who didn't in class discussions. It was also a way of the professor emphasizing that recognizing and remembering people, places, and events is only the necessary first step towards a deeper understanding of cultural anthropology or history.

--SAA
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