

# How Do You Rate as a User and Producer of Information?

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The questions below may help you assess whether you are an efficient user of information. I suggest that you make a photocopy of this page and work out your answers in the margins or on the back of an envelope in true scientist's style!

Are you interested to compare your score with those of other readers? Simply send a copy of this page, after you have filled in the answers, to the Editor, ICLARM, MC P.O. Box 1501, Makati, Metro Manila, Philippines. Your response may be quite anonymous. We will collate responses and publish a summary in a future issue of Naga.



**T**he nebulous world of "information" has taken shape and become increasingly easier to quantify in recent years. For example, various indicators are available to measure output and impact of articles published by scientists, while surveys are providing estimates of the "average" behavior of scientists in terms of their use of information.

Here we go:

**1. How many scientific articles do you read carefully on average each month?**  
A  1-5; B  6-10; C  11-15; D  >15

**2. How many hours do you spend reading these articles each month?**  
A  1-2; B  3-6; C  7-12; D  >12

**3. How do you find most of your references?**  
A  through an information service or SDI (Selective Dissemination of Information) service; B  computer databases; C  abstract journals or directories containing the contents pages of journals; D  bibliographies; E  browsing in a library or someone's bookshelves.

**4. How do you obtain copies of most of the articles you need?**

A  photocopying after browsing; B  asking the library to help you find the articles; C  through the SDI or other information service; D  through reprint requests.

**5. How many scientific articles (articles in refereed journals) have you had published? If none, next skip to question 9.**  
A  none; B  one; C  0.1-0.5/year average; D  0.6-1.0/year average; E  >1.0/year

**6. In what language are most of the scientific articles you have had published?**  
A  one or more, non-english; B  one, english; C  more than one in english

**7. Where are most of your scientific articles published?**

A  in national journals of your homeland; B  in national journals of another country; C  in a regional journal; D  in international journals.

**8. What proportion of your articles was rejected either outright or for substantial revision by the journal on first submission?**

A  none; B  a small proportion; C  half; D  most of them

**9. Are you a member of any professional societies?**

A  no; B  yes, one; C  yes, two or more

**10. Do you receive or subscribe to any scientific or technical journals?**

A  no; B  yes, 1-2; C  >2

If you are sending us a copy, please write your score here after checking your total on the following pages. Score \_\_\_\_\_

## ANSWERS: TOTAL YOUR SCORE

### 1. ARTICLES READ:

A 2    B 5    C 8    D 10

If you read 1-5 papers in a month (A), some credit is deserved, if you are being honest! However, the average US scientist reads 9 papers/month, so 6-10 (B) is only average. Scientists in the life sciences read 15 papers/month, well above average (C). Top score (D) if you read more than that.

### 2. TIME SPENT READING:

A 2    B 5    C 7    D 10

Our baseline is again the US scientific community, where the average scientist spends 45 minutes reading an article carefully. You need to spend 7-9 hours to read the average number of papers. To read 15 papers carefully each month should take 11-15 hours (C). Full marks (D) if you read much more than that. Since US life science researchers apparently only need 30 minutes to go through an average paper, they can read their 9 papers in less than 5 hours. Readers in the ICLARM library spend an average of 22 minutes/article, according to a recent survey. Call this the average (B) and only a few points if you read much less (A).

### 3. FINDING REFERENCES:

A 10    B 9    C 7    D 5    E 2

An information service takes the drudgery out of searching (A). Why not use them? Full marks if you took this step. Using computer databases is the next most efficient way to find the majority of references you need (B). Also commendable if you used the hardcopy versions, i.e., abstract journals, etc. (C), but these days you should be able to find a friendly database operator. Bibliographies (D) are better than wrestling with the raw literature (E), which is definitely passé.

### 4. OBTAINING COPIES:

A 2    B 5    C 8    D 10

In developing countries especially, tracking down copies of references is arduous. Making photocopies of items spotted haphazardly (A) is common but slow and restrictive. Asking a library to help you find articles shows good sense (B), although you are still restricting your resource base. Better is to have copies sent from an SDI or other service (C), while best of all in developing countries is to use the reprint request system (D), which also implies that you have consulted a database or abstract or contents journals in a library to locate titles and addresses.

### 5. NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS:

A 2    B 5    C 7    D 8    E 10

If you haven't published (A) you still deserve points for reading this article. I hope it stimulates you to begin writing. An average score (B) is given for just one article because the great majority of the scientific community has published no more than that! Indeed only around 10% of the scientific community has published more than about 10 papers.

### 6. LANGUAGE OF PAPERS:

A 2    B 5    C 10

Score 2 points for having your article(s) published. Most people leave them in internal or "grey" reports. Score 5 if for one article in english. Full marks if english was used for more than one. This greatly enhances the chance of the information being used in many countries and being picked up by databases. Over 80% of articles appearing in the important international "Science Citation Index" are in english, while in a Southeast Asian aquatic sciences bibliography, only 17% of the Thailand entries were in english; only 9% of Indonesian entries were in english. The implications are clear.

### 7. PUBLISHING OUTLET:

A 8    B 3    C 10    D 5

It is commendable to publish in your national journal (A), both to support and hopefully enhance its reputation (and so yours). Making a habit of publishing in another country's journal (B) looks bad; it reflects on both countries unless the journal has become "international" and there are very few of those. A regional outlet (C) implies a journal reaching most of the scientific community in your area, including your own country. This seems the most equitable way of spreading the message of your article. The real international journals (D) are perceived as the premier outlets; they are virtually all in western countries and usually too expensive for developing-country subscribers or libraries. If they publish your paper, you certainly deserve points but also lose points for sending your information where it is less needed and making it almost inaccessible to those who need it.

#### INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR LIVING AQUATIC RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

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Metro Manila, Philippines

19\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I would greatly appreciate receiving a reprint of your paper(s) entitled: \_\_\_\_\_

which appeared in \_\_\_\_\_  
Thank you for this courtesy. Sincerely yours,

Use the reprint system, it's free. Above is a typical request card. Send them by air if possible.

### 8. ARTICLES REJECTED:

A 10    B 8    C 5    D 3

Full marks for not receiving a rejection notice (A), unless you are also one of the journal editors. If so, take off 5 points! A few rejections is still praiseworthy (B). The rejection rate of journals averages about 50% these days, so if 50% of your papers suffer rejection, take an

average score (C). If you find most of your papers are rejected (D) welcome to the (silent) majority (the many who write little are more likely to have articles rejected than the few who write prolifically). Remember the aim of the referees is to encourage you to do better, so never despair at first rejections. If journal X doesn't accept the article, journal Y very well may.

subscription could give you broad coverage of the subject (B), and it may be issued by your professional society. If you subscribe to or receive more than two (C), you are clearly serious about being well informed. US scientists, comparatively well off, find on average 70% of the articles they read in their own subscription copies of journals. It is a very important source.

### 9. SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP:

A 0      B 5      C 10

It is not necessary to join a professional society, but not doing so (A) makes you an information hermit. Reach out! If you have joined one (B), good. It can only help you find out who your peers—fellow scientists or technicians in your field—are; maybe also help you obtain a scholarship, attend a meeting, etc. If you are member of more than one society (C) you have realized the advantages and need no encouragement.

### 10. JOURNALS RECEIVED:

A 2      B 5      C 10

Take a few points (A) for coming this far into this publication even if you don't receive any journals yourself. Depending on your research area, one

SCORE

### How do you rate?

A score of 10-20 means that you have not published a paper and are not going the right way about using information or preparing yourself to publish—or, of course, you are not really interested in keeping abreast of your field.

A score between 20 and 50 is indicative of a junior scientist who is showing promise, may have published a paper (perhaps from her/his thesis), and making a serious effort to obtain information. However, if your situation is more senior, it is time to take stock of your position; you need to investigate ways to access the literature much more rigorously and to contribute your experience (research results, reviews, etc.) to that literature.

If you scored between 50 and 75, you are doing moderately to quite well by traditional standards, probably having published several articles in English, using your library plus abstract and contents journals, and probably a member of a professional society. In the 1960s you would have been considered "respectable". Nowadays, however, the world is moving faster; you need to read more current literature and that probably means investigating ways of tapping into information services and computer databases.

Between 75 and 95 are scientists performing very well, well above average, using information efficiently and displaying that in their publications. By your attitude to the use of information you are either senior now or with great potential of rising to the top of your field (unless the Peter principle overtakes you and you are promoted to become an incompetent administrator).

A score of 95-100 implies that you are very well read in your subject and very much in contact with your peers. The lack of rejected articles confirms that you have also made information resources work efficiently for you (and that your research results are valid and significant). Publishing regionally or nationally shows commendable concern to uplift the status of scientific journals in your area. In short, scientists in this category can consider themselves outstanding. There are very few of you!

### Postscript

A questionnaire like this cannot encompass everyone. A flash of brilliance may be equivalent to reading a hundred volumes; one brilliant article is worth how many not-so-brilliant ones?

If you have any strong views on this questionnaire we will be glad to publish them as appropriate. Nevertheless, please send a copy of your completed questionnaire anonymously—whether low or high score.

Data on journal usage are from King, D.W., D.D. McDonald and N.K. Roderer. 1981. *Scientific journals in the United States*. Hutchinson Ross Publishing Company, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

