

Big6 Skills Overview

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The Big6™

Developed by Mike Eisenberg and Bob Berkowitz, the Big6 is the most widely known and widely used approach to teaching information and technology skills in the world. Used in thousands of K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and corporate and adult training programs, the Big6 information problem-solving model is applicable whenever people need and use information. The Big6 integrates information search and use skills along with technology tools in a systematic process to find, use, apply, and evaluate information for specific needs and tasks.

Why Big6™?

We all suffer from information overload. There's just too much "stuff" out there, and it's not easy to keep up. At the same time, there's an irony—yes, we are surrounded by information, but we can never seem to find what we want, when we want it, and in a form we want it so that we can use it effectively.

One solution to the information problem—the one that seems to be most often adopted in schools (as well as in business and society in general)—is to speed things up. We try to pack in more and more content, to work faster to get more done. But, this is a losing proposition. Speeding things up can only work for so long. Instead, we need to think about helping students to work smarter, not faster. There is an alternative to speeding things up. It's the smarter solution—one that helps students develop the skills and understandings they need to find, process, and use information effectively. This smarter solution focuses on process as well as content. Some people call this smarter solution information literacy or information skills instruction. We call it the Big6.

The Big6™ Skills

The Big6 is a process model of how people of all ages solve an information problem. From practice and study, we found that successful information problem-solving encompasses six stages with two sub-stages under each:

1. Task Definition

- 1.1 Define the information problem
- 1.2 Identify information needed

2. Information Seeking Strategies

- 2.1 Determine all possible sources
- 2.2 Select the best sources

3. Location and Access

- 3.1 Locate sources (intellectually and physically)
- 3.2 Find information within sources

4. Use of Information

- 4.1 Engage (e.g., read, hear, view, touch)
- 4.2 Extract relevant information

5. Synthesis

- 5.1 Organize from multiple sources
- 5.2 Present the information

6. Evaluation

- 6.1 Judge the product (effectiveness)
- 6.2 Judge the process (efficiency)

People go through these Big6 stages—consciously or not—when they seek or apply information to solve a problem or make a decision. It’s not necessary to complete these stages in a linear order, and a given stage doesn’t have to take a lot of time. We have found that in almost all successful problem-solving situations, all stages are addressed.

In addition to considering the Big6 as a process, another useful way to view the Big6 is as a set of basic, essential life skills. These skills can be applied across situations—to school, personal, and work settings. The Big6 Skills are applicable to all subject areas across the full range of grade levels. Students use the Big6 Skills whenever they need information to solve a problem, make a decision, or complete a task.

The Big6 Skills are best learned when integrated with classroom curriculum and activities. Teachers and library media specialists can begin to use the Big6 immediately by:

- Using the Big6 terminology when giving various tasks and assignments
- Talking students through the process for a particular assignment
- Asking key questions and focusing attention on specific Big6 actions to accomplish.

Various computer and information technology skills are integral parts of the Big6 Skills. For example, when students use word processing to compose a letter, that’s Big6 #5, Synthesis. When they search for information on the World Wide Web, that’s Big6 #3, Location & Access. When they use e-mail to discuss an assignment with another student or the teacher, that’s Big6 #1, Task Definition. Using computers can “turbo-boost” students’ abilities.