

Critically Thinking about “Information as a Thing”

Please respond to the questions below thoughtfully and in complete sentences. Remember critical thinking goes beyond reading. It involves objectively looking to analyze and evaluate the text. Through critical thinking, you are better able to form your own reflections and conclusions. Buckland’s “Information as a Thing” is considered a classic reading in the field our LIS.

1. **What is the purpose/aim of this text?** M.K. Buckland's article Information as Thing Information as Thing. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 42(5), 351-360.) is an informative and interesting way to introduce a new way to think about information for a person in the Library Information Science (LIS) profession. Buckland creates an ethos where he presents paradigms (objects, data, documents, and events, information foundations) to guide one into seeing "information as a thing" that results in viewing information as *evidence*. Buckland is trying to persuade the reader to view information as a thing- the thing being a source of evidence verified by a person or group based on the amount of knowledge information they have at the time.

How do you know? Buckland (1991) wrote:

Instead of the tedious task of reviewing candidate objects and inquiring whether they should be examples of information-as-thing, we can reverse the process and ask people to identify the things by or on account of which they came to be informed. (p. 352)

How might this influence the way it is written? Buckland’s belief in information as evidence compelled him to write about the ambiguities of the term information and how this ambiguity could lead to stagnation in the categorization of information. Buckland’s mission is to convince the reader that viewing information under the prism of evidence is a form of learning and understanding, Buckland stated, “In a significant sense information is used as evidence in learning-as the basis for understanding. One’s knowledge and opinions are affected by what one sees, reads, hears, and experiences,” (Buckland, 1991, p.353)

2. **Are any assumptions being made in this text?** Buckland assumes that everyone in the LIS profession will come around to working under the premise that information is evidence. Buckland assumes that all information can be classified as information just because it exists.
3. **Do these assumptions seem reasonable in this context?** Overall, Buckland’s argument is reasonable thorough his use of analogies and the references he cites to back up what he is saying. **Why or why not?** Buckland states the traditional definition of information is subjective and restrictive at times, Information as a thing is an action that compels the reader to think of everything as information. However, at one point, Buckland seems to contradict himself by saying everything is not information; to appease a disagreeing reader.

4. **Are any generalizations being made?** Despite briefly admitting everything may not be seen as information, Buckland assumes more frequently than not that anything can be classified as information, **Are these generalizations reasonable here?** The generalization is reasonable because Buckland viewpoint is like the philosophy of interpellation. For example, interpellation is Althusser's term to describe a mechanism whereby the human subject is 'constituted' (constructed) by pre-given structures (a structuralist stance). By being named or 'hailed' as a member of a group, a person is led to see themselves as an ideological subject. *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved 11 Feb. 2024, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100008265> Buckland applies the same methodology to information as evidence.

5. **What data, what experiences, what evidence are given?** Buckland writes about Information Science and retrieval systems, especially the cost and size of storage systems that are needed for information handling- companies struggle with this dilemma as to what to do with storage, especially costly cloud storage. Buckland writes about data and events being sources of information that also function as evidence. An artifact from or picture of a natural disaster would be an example of the type of data, experience, or evidence Buckland writes about.

6. **What concepts are used to organize this data, these experiences?** Buckland uses the four aspects of information as a foundation for his viewpoint about evidence. (p.352) He also provides information about data, objects, copies, and information storage systems. Buckland wrote a persuasive essay based using concepts known by LIS professionals.

	INTANGIBLE	TANGIBLE
ENTITY 2.	Information-as-knowledge Knowledge	3. Information-as-thing Data, document
PROCESS 1.	Information-as-process Becoming informed	4. Information processing Data processing

FIG. 1. Four aspects of information.

7. **Is Buckland's thinking justified as far as you can see from your perspective?** Buckland's thinking is justified especially in the age of digital information and social media that did not exist in 1991. Buckland had an inkling technology that would advance the ways people learn about, receive, or retrieve information. A consensus about how information is interpreted is still valuable and needed today.

8. **How does Buckland justify this thinking from his perspective?** Buckland believes the LIS professional will make the right choice about information if they follow his lead and think of information as a thing. Buckland states, "information-as a thing deserves careful examination, partly because it is the only form of information with which information systems can deal directly." (Buckland,1991, p. 359) LIS professionals will be thinking of information as a thing, will understand every source of information will not stored, due to its physical nature. However, representational information can be accessed instead.

9. **How does your personal knowledge and experiences affect the way you read the article?** As a woman who is a member of Gen X and a person of color, all these identifiers are evidence of who I am. A librarian could catalogue me under each category or a combined category with all the identifiers. Because I live in a moment and time where evidence of what someone looks like externally may not represent how they feel inside. I get where Buckland is trying to go as far as information as evidence or representation, and how LIS profession must expand their knowledge base.
10. **Regarding as an important and “classic” reading within our field, what are your reflections on this article?** It is dated. Is it still relevant? Or what would you change?

Buckland’s viewpoint is still relevant. The article is a snapshot of Buckland trying to push along the idea of information as thing into the future Buckland. If I read Buckland’s article in 1991 or today in 2024, I would still find his thoughts engaging and fresh, due to the development of new sources of information due to technology.

References: Buckland, M. K. (1991). Information as Thing. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 42(5), 351-360.

interpellation. *Oxford Reference*. Retrieved 11 Feb. 2024, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100008265>.

Adapted from University College London’s Critical Reading Questions and the Foundation for Critical Thinking’s Basic Questions and Answers