



# History of *Information*

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**early history of the word**

**restricted uses**

**opening up & counting**

**too much information**



# your information

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"not of an age,  
but for all time"



"On an average weekday, the *New York Times* contains more information than any contemporary of Shakespeare's would have acquired in a lifetime"



how much information?

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# how much information?

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**King James Bible, c 1611: 0**



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**Shakespeare, 1564-1616: 2**



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"But reason with the fellow  
Before you punish him, where he heard this,  
Lest you shall chance to whip your information  
And beat the messenger who bids beware."  
*Coriolanus*





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*Jonathan Swift* THE *Red Book* # 115  
**NEW WORLD**  
 OF  
**ENGLISH WORDS:**  
 Or, a General  
**DICTIONARY:**  
 Containing the Interpretations of such hard words as are derived from other Languages; whether Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, English, Dutch, Saxon, &c. their Etymologies and perfect Definitions:  
 Together with  
 All those Terms that relate to the Arts and Sciences; whether Theologic, Philosophy, Logic, Rhetoric, Grammar, Ethics, Law, Natural History, Magick, Physick, Chirurgery, Anatomy, Chimistry, Botanicke, Mathematicke, Arithmetick, Geometry, Astronomy, Astrology, Chiro-mancy, Physiognomy, Navigation, Fortification, Drilling, Surveying, Musicke, Perfumery, Architecture, Heraldry, Cartography, Mechanick, Statick, Merchandize, Jewelling, Painting, Coining, Husbandry, Horsemanship, Marking, Hunting, & Fishing, &c.  
 To which are added  
 The significations of Paper Names, Mythology, and Poetical Figures, Historical Relations, Geographical Descriptions of most Countries and Cities of the World; especially of those three Nations wherein their chief Antiquities, Battles, and other most Memorable Passages are mentioned; as also all other Subjects that are useful, and appertain to our English Language.  
*A Work very necessary for Strangers, as well as our own Countrymen, for all Persons that would rightly understand what they discourse, write, or read.*  
 Collected and published by R. P. Borel . . .  
 For the greater honour of those Learned Gentlemen and Artists that have been assiduous in the most Practical Sciences, their Names are affixed in the next Page,  
*Deus Dicit in quocumque Verbo. Virgil.*  
 London, Printed by E. Tyler, for Nath. Bowles at the Sign of the Angel in Cornhill, 1658. M

coming into the language

**hard words**  
*Information*, (lat.) an informing, telling, or making known.



*Information*, (lat.) an informing, telling, nor making known.

*Informatus non sum*, a formal answer made by an Attorney, that is commanded by the Court to say what he thinks good in defence of his Client, whereby he deemed to leave his Client undefended and so judgement passeth for the adverse party.



*Informatus non sum*, a formal answer, made by an Attorney, that is commanded by the Court to say what he thinks good in defence of his

Client

Edward Philips, *The New World of English Words*, 1658



# "go to the poets"

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## **17th to 18th century**

John Milton (1608-1674) 0

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) 1

John Dryden (1631-1700) 2

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) 6

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Daniel Defoe (1660?-1731) 20

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) 28



# whose information?

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"Dacier observes that this is added by  
Homer not for our information, for we  
already know it"

**Alexander Pope, *Odyssey*, 1725-26**



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"a difference that makes a difference"  
**Gregory Bateson, 1979**



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"a difference that makes a difference"  
**Gregory Bateson, 1979**

"Who wants yesterday's papers"  
**Rolling Stones, 1967**



# new word, new world

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**a few years later ...**

he received information

information was given to

having received information

he procured good information

he gave information

information he had received

Clinton then received information

a letter, giving information

**Jedidiah Morse, *The History of America,***

**Philadelphia, 1795**



# how much information?



"how much information"

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Results 1 - 10 of about 938,000 for "how [much information](#)".

## [How Much Information?](#)

Attempts to measure **how much information** is produced in the world each year by looking at media and other variables. Produced by the School of Information ...

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# "how much information?"

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# "how much information"

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"How much information would we not be  
deprived of if there was no night?"

--Sturm, 1791

"These early extracts ... show how much  
information he derived from this  
excellent writer."

--*Biographical Dictionary*, 1798

"How much ingenuity might be displayed,  
and how much information communicated  
by a professor."

Clarke, 1796



# counting

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**GREELEY'S TRAVELS IN EUROPE.--GLANCE AT GREAT EUROPE:** In a series of Letters from GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, ITALY, &c. By HORACE GREELEY. Octavo, cloth; price, one dollar. This volume comprises the observations made during Mr. Greeley's recent European tour, on Society, Manners and Customs, Art, Literature, Agriculture, Foreign Politics, and a great variety of other attractive and exciting topics.

It has copious notices of the Great Exhibition or World's Fair in London; complete descriptions of the Cultivation of the Soil in different countries; brilliant Criticisms of the Works of Art in the great European Capitals; and graphic sketches of Public and Domestic Life in London, Paris, Rome, &c., written in the frank, straightforward, piquant style for which Mr. Greeley is widely celebrated.

A more authentic, instructive, and amusing Book of Travels has probably never been issued from the American press. The vast amount of information which it contains is presented in such a lively and off-hand manner that the perusal of the volume becomes as interesting as a novel.

Whoever would obtain a fresh, Daguerreotype view of the present state of England, should not fail to make himself acquainted with its contents. Even the discussion of the driest topics, which it sometimes takes up, is enlivened with such frequent flashes of humor, and pervaded with such genial and sparkling vivacity, that no one who commences the volume can lay it down without finishing its perusal.





# old fears

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## **who said and when?**

"It will soon be the employment of a lifetime merely to learn [books'] names. Many a man of passable information at the present day reads scarcely anything but reviews, and before long, a man of erudition will be little better than a mere walking catalogue."



# old fears

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## **who said and when?**

"Even for studies, where expenditure is most honorable, [developing large libraries] is justifiable only so long as it is kept within bounds. What is the use of having countless books, and libraries whose mere titles their owners can scarcely read through in a whole life time?"



# what did it?

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**printing**  
**books**  
**libraries**  
...



# to begin at the beginning

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Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions ... this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality."

(Plato, *Phaedrus*)