

Literacy

What is literacy?

Literacy is critical in helping us make meaning of the world around us. Literacy includes reading, writing, viewing, listening and speaking, but it also encompasses much more.

Alberta Education defines literacy as the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living.

Our technologically-driven society has expanded our notion of literacy. Today we communicate and interact globally using multiple types of print, images, symbols and sounds, often through digital media.

Literacy is socially and culturally based. People create meaning based on their language, culture and ways of knowing.

Why is literacy so important?

Literacy, along with numeracy, opens doors and opportunities for individuals to acquire the knowledge they need to achieve personal goals and build a better quality of life. It lays the foundation for lifelong learning and active participation in society. Literacy is essential for sharing histories, personal experiences and stories about traditions and the past.

How do we use literacy throughout life?

Literacy is learned, applied and developed throughout our lifetime and is nurtured through families and communities.



- Babies communicate their needs and feelings to their parents through sound, gesture and body language. Oral language development lays the foundation for later literacy learning.

- Young children develop literacy as they discover stories, songs and visual images. They engage in literacy during make-believe play, when scribbling on paper and when reading environmental print such as a stop sign.



- Older children actively communicate with their peers, often through digital media. They use literacy as they explore their ideas or interests, seek entertainment and investigate events happening around the world using a variety of print and digital media.

- Adults use literacy to read and understand directions, recipes, advertisements, manuals and websites. Throughout their day, they may create reports, fill out forms, negotiate transactions or analyze information.



How is literacy learned in school?

Literacy is a shared responsibility among educators. It is a part of learning in all subjects and grades. Although specific literacy knowledge and skills are taught primarily in Language Arts, every subject or discipline area teacher can help further develop, strengthen and enhance literacy.

Every subject area has its own unique literacy features. Current programs of study support students in learning how to read different kinds of text; write and express themselves in the formats associated with each subject and use content-specific vocabulary.

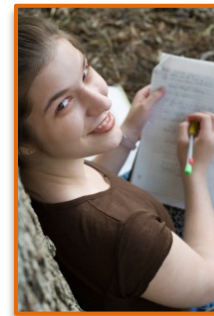
“The ability to read, write and communicate connects people to one another and empowers them to achieve things they never thought possible. Communication and connection are the basis of who we are and how we live together and interact with the world.”

– International Literacy Association, 2015

<https://www.literacyworldwide.org/why-literacy>

Examples of literacy across subject areas

- In Fine Arts, students:
 - express ideas, emotions and understanding through movement, music, dramatic play or visual representation;
 - read a musical score; and
 - write and produce a play.
- In Health and Life Skills, Physical Education, and CALM, students:
 - describe how social messages and stereotypes can affect feelings of self-worth;
 - set and modify written goals to improve personal wellness; and
 - research and explain the skills, attitudes and behaviours for building, maintaining and enhancing healthy, positive relationships.



- In Language Arts, students:
 - communicate feelings evoked by a story using a media or mode such as dance, art, or video;
 - create rhyme in a song or poem; and
 - adjust oral and written communication according to audience.

- In Mathematics, students:
 - understand math-specific vocabulary and recognize that words can have different meanings depending on the context;
 - explain their reasoning in answering a question; and
 - acquire information and use comprehension strategies to solve a mathematical problem.

- In Science, students:
 - engage in research based on brainstormed ideas and questions on a specific topic;
 - read and interpret the periodic table; and
 - record daily weather in journals using text and illustrations.



- In Social Studies, students:
 - prepare and participate in a debate on a current event;
 - write to the mayor about the need for a new playground in their community; and
 - interpret a political cartoon.

