

Digital Literacy Skills are Skills for Life

An effective digital literacy curriculum will more closely resemble the approaches and methodology of media literacy training than computer literacy training. Media literacy — the ability to critically consume and create media — is an essential skill in today's world. Media literacy education seeks to give kids and adults greater freedom by empowering them to access, analyze, evaluate and produce media. As a subset of media literacy, digital literacy would focus upon digital media: computing technologies, broadband infrastructure, mobile communications, and internet-based communication and collaboration services — blogs, self-published documents and presentations, and social networking platforms.

While basic computing skills form the foundation for a digital literacy curriculum, effective digital literacy training will provide participants with the motivations and context for maximizing the potential advantages of modern Internet technologies and applications within business, nonprofit and community environments. This educational model requires a broad focus on training participants in how to access and produce information digitally, how we create meaning from Digital Media messages, how Digital Media affect us, and the interaction of Digital Media and society as well as the potential role of digital literacy in bringing about change. Providing participants with the technical and cognitive skills necessary to access, analyze, evaluate and produce digital media will allow them to participate more fully in 21st century society.

Digital media and the methods by which individuals and organizations use them have undergone a paradigm shift over the past decade. The skills necessary to create modern internet technologies, such as rich media and interactive websites, custom social networks and mobile applications, have become professionalized: the education and experience necessary for their creation has moved beyond the scope of a community-centered training program. Meanwhile, those same technologies have undergone a process of consumerization that makes their usage accessible to those with only basic computer literacy skills, which today are more widespread across populations. Millions of people every day create online, interactive, and rich-media experiences (for example, by embedding YouTube videos into their Facebook profiles) yet do not have the skills necessary to build a basic website, nor do they need those professional skills to engage through modern technologies. An effective digital literacy curriculum must teach participants to apply these technologies —technologies in which they may already be casually proficient—in the search for solutions within business, nonprofit and community environments.

The broader skills of media literacy and digital literacy in particular can be taught through a variety of programs —not just through a training exclusively dedicated to digital literacy. Not only can digital literacy be incorporated into the teaching of alcohol and drug prevention, financial literacy, and the teaching of skills to navigate medical and health services, but also, due to the pervasiveness of broadband technologies, any comprehensive curriculum should now include components that teach the valuable cognitive and critical thinking skills necessary to interact in an online environment.