

Digital Literacy, AI, and the Liberal Arts: From Taxonomies to Heuristics for Teaching and Learning

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Key question

What does it mean to teach and learn well, here and now, in your institutional context, amid ongoing developments in digital literacy, including the emergence of generative AI?

Pausing is an effective strategy

For institutions

For teachers

For students



Students are navigating contradictory messages

They are told, on the one hand, that AI will define their future workplaces and that not knowing how to use it will disadvantage them

On the other hand, they are warned that using it may constitute misconduct or a violation of academic integrity

Or worse, that it may undermine their learning, weaken critical thinking, and ultimately dumb them down



Heuristic frameworks

Provide shared language, values, and orientations that help people reason together when new situations arise

Support deliberation rather than shutting it down

Help institutions think rather than merely react

Reflect purposes, practices, values, and forms of responsibility



My overall point

A multiliteracies approach can help translate your AI Charter from a statement of principles into a living pedagogical resource

Digital literacy is an ongoing, situated practice

One reason conversations about digital literacy often feel frustrating is that the term itself refuses to settle into a single, stable definition

AI is less a rupture than an acceleration

It forces educators to surface pedagogical assumptions that have long remained implicit

What is literacy?

Literacy is best understood not as a fixed status one either possesses or lacks, but as an ongoing process of making meaning with symbols, texts, and technologies in particular contexts

Reasoning is central to literacy

Literacy requires interpreting situations, weighing evidence, anticipating consequences, and making judgments about what to say, how to say it, and why

Literacy is situated and relational

It takes shape within communities, institutions, and activity systems that value certain forms of knowledge and expression over others

Literacy to literacies

Thinking in terms of literacies recognizes that people routinely move among multiple systems of meaning, each with its own expectations for evidence, credibility, audience awareness, and action

A multiliteracies framework

Functional

Critical

Rhetorical



A multiliteracies framework, elaborated

Type	Metaphor	Subject Position	Objective
Functional	Technologies as tools	Students as users of technologies	Effective employment
Critical	Technologies as cultural artifacts	Students as questioners of technologies	Informed critique
Rhetorical	Technologies as expressive media	Students as producers of technologies	Reflective praxis

A functionally literate student

uses digital environments effectively in achieving educational goals

understands the social conventions that help determine the use of digital environments

makes use of the specialized discourses associated with digital environments

manages their digital world

resolves impasses confidently and strategically

A critically literate student

scrutinizes the dominant perspectives that shape digital design cultures and their artifacts

sees use contexts as an inseparable aspect of digital environments that help to contextualize and constitute them

understands that institutional forces shape the use of digital environments

scrutinizes representations of digital environments in the public imagination



A rhetorically literate student

produces academic work with an awareness of where particular digital tools belong within a workflow process

makes intentional choices about where and when to use, limit, or exclude specific technologies to meet the goals of an assignment

aligns stages of production with differing expectations about assistance, originality, and authorship

understands that placing technology at particular moments in a workflow shapes how academic work is interpreted, evaluated, and credited

Multiliteracies as an institutional and pedagogical framework



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Institutional practices: Designing for judgment rather than control



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Classroom practices: Making learning visible in an age of delegation



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Living With Frameworks



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Questions and Discussion



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