

Media Literacy for the Digital Era

A School and District Guide to Navigating Modern Media



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A School and District Guide to Navigating Modern Media

- Alan Miller, News Literacy Project Founder and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist



Britannica describes literacy as the “capacity to communicate using inscribed, printed, or electronic signs or symbols for representing language.” Media literacy takes this a step further, adding to traditional literacy skills to account for new types of media.

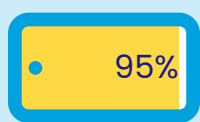


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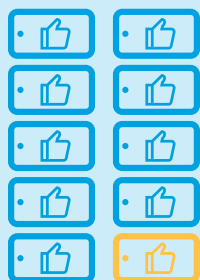
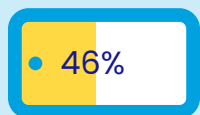
Fast Facts: Youth Media Use



Daily screen time for teens age 13–18 is nearly 9 hours each day, not including time for homework.³



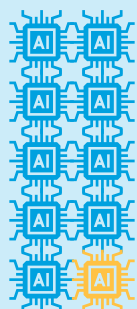
95% of teens age 13–17 have access to smartphones and 46% say they are online "almost constantly."⁴



90% of teens age 13–17 have used social media.⁵



500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute.⁶



More than 9 in 10 students age 12–18 are interested in AI learning tools, with over half already using ChatGPT.⁷

With so much screen time, endless content streams, a vast range of media platforms, and the rise of generative AI, understanding and interpreting media is more critical than ever. Yet, only some students have the strategies or knowledge to handle this multifaceted media landscape.

Do Students Know How to Recognize Accurate Information?

In many cases, no.

More than **50% of students** are not even “moderately confident” in whether they can recognize false information online.⁸

So, how can we effectively address some of the most pressing issues of our time? It all starts with empowering students with the tools they need to become critical and well-informed media users. Of course, this is only possible if those leading the charge are equipped with resources to guide students through this journey.

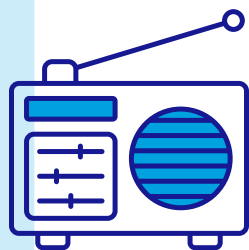
Britannica Education recognizes the tremendous importance of media literacy, and we have been at the forefront of these conversations since the beginning. As the world of media literacy becomes increasingly complex, we will continue to focus our efforts on educating students and teachers about the issues in the months and years to come.

Through this guide, along with a new collection of media literacy resources and workshops, we are here to provide educators with techniques to help students identify biases, evaluate sources, recognize false information, and ultimately make informed decisions about a diverse range of media. Thanks to our thorough and meticulous editorial process, which equips students and educators across the globe with expert, trusted knowledge across subject areas, you can feel assured that our information is safe, appropriate, and vetted for your dedicated students.

A Journey from Print to Pixels

A Mass Media Evolution Timeline

From newspapers to TikTok, the metamorphosis of media reflects more than evolution: it mirrors society's shifting tastes, responses to technological innovations, and craving for connectivity and knowledge.



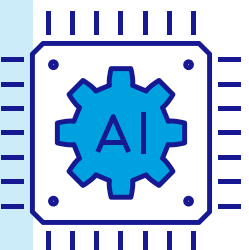
1920s

The first commercial **radio** broadcast in the U.S. airs, introducing live auditory information sharing and transforming news into a real-time communal experience.



1990s

The **Internet** emerges, disrupting the media landscape forever; online newspapers, blogs, and forums start to erode the stronghold of traditional print and broadcast models.



Present

Artificial intelligence becomes the new architect of the media space, curating personalized news feeds, aiding content creation, driving recommendations, and shaping a new era of hyper-individualized media use.

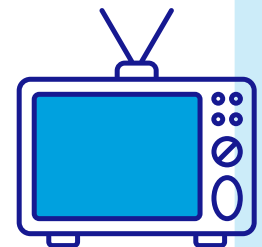
1833

The **New York Sun** ushers in the penny press, making **newspapers** accessible to a broader audience and paving the way for mass media.



1950s

Television becomes a household staple, marking a visual turn in news dissemination and entertainment, with the evening news becoming a daily ritual for many families.



2000s

The rise of **social media** platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, creates a more interactive, user-generated form of content sharing.



Beyond the Hype: A Fresh Take on Media Literacy in the AI Era

Artificial intelligence, or AI, has introduced new complexities in the information environment, requiring us to figure out how it works, the values driving the technology, and the challenges it poses. AI also offers tremendous opportunities—as well as pitfalls—for educators and students, and many have already jumped on board the AI train to tap its potential.



Sourcing Responsible AI

AI's evolution has introduced a new dimension to media literacy. Generative AI, capable of creating coherent and contextually relevant content, blurs the lines between human- and machine-generated information, posing challenges in discerning the authenticity of information. Most free generative AI tools on the internet scan the World Wide Web and source information from anything it can find—which does often include inaccuracies that can lead users astray.

In education, it's essential to use a responsible AI in the classroom to keep legitimate information front and center. One way to implement responsible AI is to use a tool that

sources verified information (i.e., the AI has set parameters for what to look at when it generates information and outputs). And, Britannica Education is now a vendor with such AI tools!

ASK Britannica—the AI-powered search feature embedded in products such as Britannica School, Britannica Academic, and Britannica Library—searches within Britannica's 250+ years of trusted content, thereby providing students with fact-based, verifiable information rather than unvetted sources. Meanwhile, Britannica's AI-driven educator tools simplify tasks like assessment creation, text adaptation, and content curation, allowing teachers to focus on what matters most; engaging and inspiring their students.

Misinformation: A New Type of “Infodemic”

Educator Strategies for Digital Navigation



Misinformation and disinformation are pervasive problems in the digital age, fueled by the ease of content creation and sharing. **The overabundance of digital communication methods combined with sophisticated technology and a steady stream of information flowing to global audiences makes it increasingly difficult to discern what is real and what isn't.** Media framing and bias further complicate the landscape, making it challenging to trust information, even from sources we may not immediately question.

Educators are in a unique position to guide students through this complex landscape. This holistic approach begins with you and the powerful trust you have with your students. Your influential work in the classroom equips young learners with lateral reasoning and critical thinking skills to identify biases, evaluate information accuracy, and understand how information impacts individuals and society.

Even more, your efforts can create meaningful connections between media literacy and social-emotional learning (SEL) to help your learners increase both self and social awareness. Educators have the power to empower students to not understand information's impacts, but also to become more resilient media users, even in a world of uncertainty.

Misinformation: Incorrect or misleading information, often shared innocently or without realizing the information is inaccurate.

Disinformation: False information deliberately and often covertly spread in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.

Tip: To remember the difference, think of “mis” in misinformation as mistake; and the “d” in disinformation as deception.



Disarming Disinformation and Misinformation

Kids learn about and make sense of the world through information-seeking behaviors and habits. They regularly interact online and get news more often from social media and than from traditional news organizations. As such, it is essential that they are equipped with the tools to question the accuracy, representation, and impact of the information they use, from basic awareness to skills-focused knowledge.

Media can shape people's attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors. Guide students to evaluate media and understand the reasons behind their creation, curation, and repurposing with these critical-thinking questions:

- What is the impact of this media?
- What is the information's intent?
- How can you tell whether this media shows any bias?
- Is this an accurate representation of what is happening? Why or why not?
- How is this media making you and others feel?
- How do you and others react to this media?



Digital Footprint and Privacy: Help Students Protect Their Online Presence

Another key facet of digital literacy is understanding and managing our digital presence. In an interconnected digital world, managing digital footprints is crucial for maintaining Internet safety. Every online interaction leaves a trace. Media literacy converges with our digital presence by empowering us to control our online presence, make informed decisions, and protect our privacy and personal lives.

One way educators can help students understand their digital footprints—anything they write, post, or comment online—is to have them Google their names. They may be surprised to find details about themselves that are already publicly available, including their social media profiles.⁹

Students can manage their digital footprints by protecting passwords, keeping their accounts private, avoiding clickbait, and more. There are also numerous resources and K–12 lesson plan ideas from credible organizations that provide educators with ideas to teach students at every age and level how to maintain their safety online. Here's one of our favorites from [Common Sense Education](#).¹⁰



Fostering Media Literacy

Top 5 Tips and Tools

Create a conducive learning environment for media literacy by leveraging these resources and staying informed about the latest developments in media and technology.



Tip 1: Valuing Expertise

One of the best ways to avoid falling into disinformation traps is to incorporate balanced, current, and fact-checked information compiled by subject matter experts.

Britannica Education is a beacon of trusted information for educators and students with our meticulous editorial creation and review process that includes experts in their field, such as Nobel Prize winners, heads of state, world activists, notable sports figures, and U.S. presidents.

Even more, [Britannica School](#) offers thousands of curriculum-aligned articles, images, videos, recommended websites, and more. As the go-to site for research—the core of any inquiry learning model—this innovative platform is trusted by millions of students and educators around the globe, with over 140 million student users in 83 countries.

Britannica Education's content is:

- ✓ **Expert-verified**
- ✓ **Current**
- ✓ **Clear**
- ✓ **Trustworthy**
- ✓ **Objective/Fair**

[Discover Britannica School](#)

Tip 2: Evaluate Objectivity vs. Agenda

Some sources are better than others, and students must understand and evaluate the agendas behind each one. Teach students to discern between objective information and biased content as well as to identify and navigate echo chambers created by digital algorithms.

Visit [Teach Britannica](#) for open-access lesson minis and activities to help teach age-appropriate media literacy skills. Here are some favorites:

- [Grades 3–5: Digital Research and Communication Skills](#)
- [Grades 6–8: Media Literacy in the Age of AI](#)
- [Grades 9–12: Media Literacy: Think. Question. Create.](#)



Tip 3: Expand Your Search

Help students cast a wide net and form a balanced perspective. Encourage them to find multiple sources, compare search results, verify details with reputable databases, and know where to find credible information.

Try using [ASK Britannica](#), the AI-search feature in Britannica Education's research solutions. This question-and-answer tool helps students ask thoughtful, natural-language questions and get concise, trustworthy answers, sourced from Britannica's expert-reviewed content.

[See ASK in Action](#)

Tip 4: Source Real-World News

Energize your media literacy lessons with real-world news. [Britannica School's "In the News!"](#) delivers biweekly news updates, adapted for various student reading levels, and enriched with vocabulary exercises from Merriam-Webster, intriguing "Did You Know?" segments, and links to comprehensive articles.

[Elementary In the News](#)

[Middle School In the News](#)

Tip 5: Fight False Information

False information spreads quickly—whether through technology or word of mouth. Navigating truth in today's fast-paced world requires sharp skills and smart strategies. Download Britannica's five fact-checking tips to help students think critically and stay informed.

[Keep It Real](#)

Additional Resources

Are You For Real? Fact-Based Learning in a Clickbait World

Where are your students getting their information? No matter where they click, students need the skills to evaluate text and media, avoid disinformation, and think critically about the world. Hear from the experts on best practices for developing background knowledge to help students evaluate current events.

[Watch Webinar Recording](#)

Trusted Resources for Navigating Modern Media

In a world of endless content streams, platforms, screen time, and generative AI, understanding and interpreting media is more important than ever. Access more resources to empower students to become informed media users with insights, strategies, key terms, classroom activities, and more.

[Get Resources](#)

Interactive Classroom Activity Lineup

Your work as an educator inspires us! Thanks to your efforts in the classroom, students can feel confident taking on the media world now and in the years to come. We're here to help make your important work a little easier with curated, interactive media literacy activities for students of all ages to encourage conversations, test knowledge, and practice skills.



Challenge: Spot the Fake

Provide students with a mix of real and fake news articles. (Tip: Use articles that seem believable at first glance for deeper analysis.) For article and image examples, visit [Snopes.com](https://snopes.com), a site for debunking false information with a 'True or False Game.'

Students should identify which stories are real and justify their decisions using the [CRAAP test](#), a method to evaluate information based on:

- **Currency:** How recent is the information?
- **Relevance:** Does it relate to the topic?
- **Authority:** Who is the author or source?
- **Accuracy:** Is the information supported by evidence?
- **Purpose:** Why was this information created?

Conclude with a class discussion on their evaluation methods.



Media Diary

This reflective activity can help students understand their own media usage. Encourage them to maintain a diary for a week, noting:

- the types of media they access
- the platforms they use
- their sources of information
- and their media use patterns

Invite students to share their key findings from their media diaries with the class, reflecting on any new insights they've discovered about their media habits.



Image Evaluation

You know well how important it is to recognize fake images, which makes you the perfect person to help your students learn those skills as well!

Explain the importance of vetting images, videos, and other forms of multimedia, and discuss the shortcomings of AI-generated images. Show students several images that are real (hint: use [Britannica ImageQuest](#) for safe, age-appropriate, rights-cleared images) as well as some that have been digitally altered.

Share resources to verify images, such as [Google Reverse Image Search](#) or [TinEye](#). Reference [PBS LearningMedia's helpful video](#) demonstrating how students can do this.

Give your students sample images, and ask them to use these resources to determine which images are real and which have been altered.



Fact vs. Opinion: Stand-Up Activity

Start by inviting students to share their interpretations of what a fact is. After discussing their ideas, you can provide clear examples to illustrate factual information, such as "broccoli is a vegetable" or " $2 + 2 = 4$."

Next, encourage students to express their understanding of what an opinion is. Follow this with an explanation that opinions are personal or shared views, offering examples for clarity. For instance, "Macaroni and cheese is the best food" is an opinion, as it varies from person to person.

Consider incorporating interactive elements, such as worksheets, to engage students in classifying statements as facts or opinions.



A Global Perspective: Media Literacy and AI Challenges

Media literacy and AI challenges are not confined to specific regions or cultures. As our world grows more interconnected, it is important for all of us as a global community to understand the nuances and unique challenges that have arisen.



As internet usage grows, so does the influence of social media. Most regions around the world grapple with the spread of online misinformation and disinformation and the role of platforms in shaping public opinion.

Many countries have rich histories of public broadcasting and high internet penetration rates, yet these areas face issues related to privacy, data protection, and the rise of nationalist propaganda online.



Rapid technological advancements and global interconnectedness has influenced media and information sharing around the world. However, issues like censorship and state-controlled media continue to present unique challenges to information.



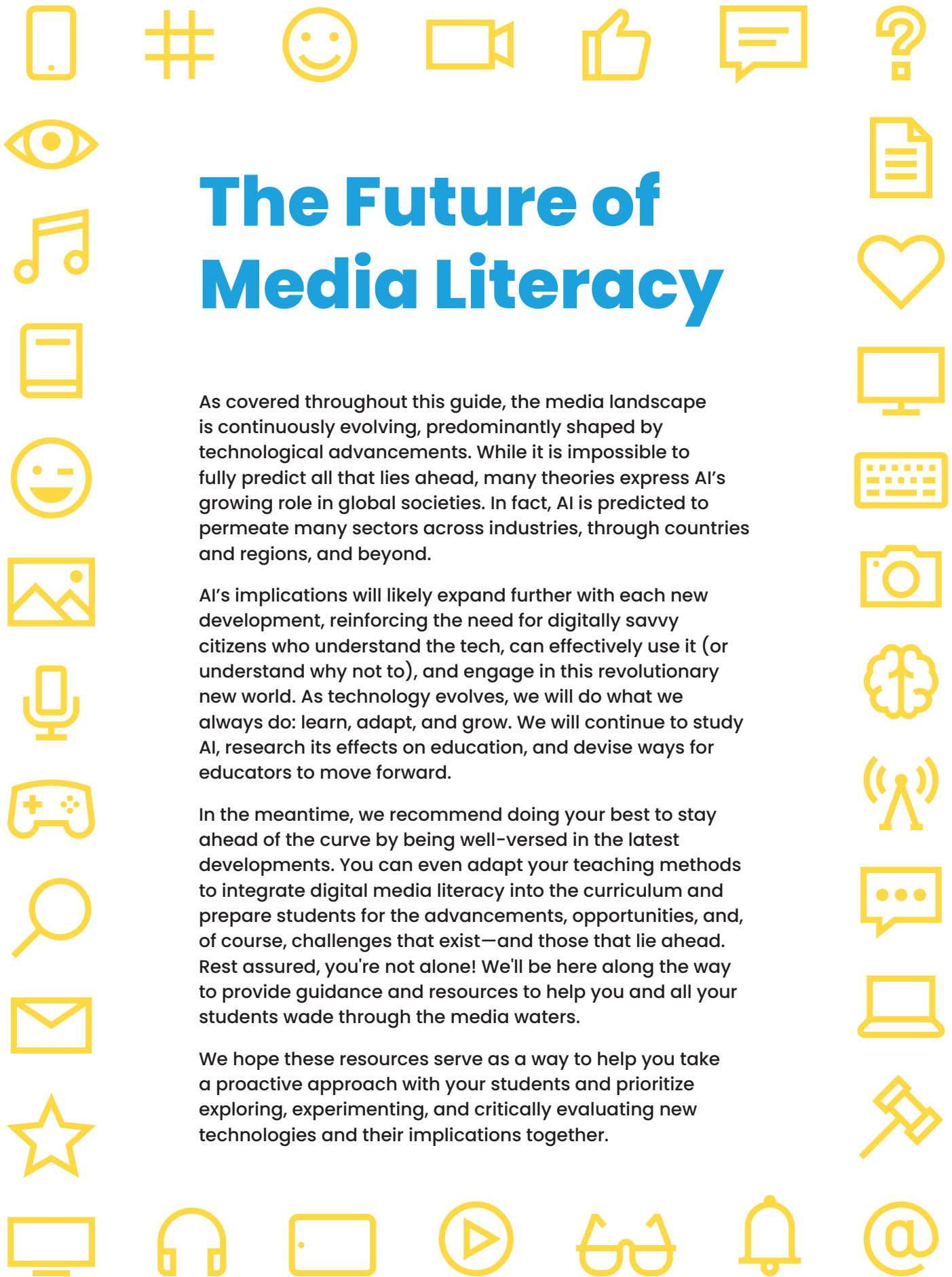


Global Initiatives

As media environments adapt and generative-AI use proliferates worldwide, governments, NGOs, and even private entities have come together to advance media literacy. International and local NGOs work to secure reliable information access in global communities. And this is likely only the beginning. Global collaboration has had—and will continue to have—a tremendous impact on ensuring informed, critical global publics.

Here are a few of the many global initiatives making a difference:

- **UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy (MIL):** An initiative promoting critical engagement with information through guidelines, resources, and courses on a global level.
- **UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance:** Previously GAPMIL, this alliance fosters global cooperation to ensure universal access to media and information literacy skills.
- **International Council for Media Literacy:** A nonprofit advocating for global media literacy through programs, policies, and research.
- **European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN):** A collective of fact-checking organizations battling misinformation and disinformation with online games, training, and podcasts.



The Future of Media Literacy

As covered throughout this guide, the media landscape is continuously evolving, predominantly shaped by technological advancements. While it is impossible to fully predict all that lies ahead, many theories express AI's growing role in global societies. In fact, AI is predicted to permeate many sectors across industries, through countries and regions, and beyond.







AI's implications will likely expand further with each new development, reinforcing the need for digitally savvy citizens who understand the tech, can effectively use it (or understand why not to), and engage in this revolutionary new world. As technology evolves, we will do what we always do: learn, adapt, and grow. We will continue to study AI, research its effects on education, and devise ways for educators to move forward.

In the meantime, we recommend doing your best to stay ahead of the curve by being well-versed in the latest developments. You can even adapt your teaching methods to integrate digital media literacy into the curriculum and prepare students for the advancements, opportunities, and, of course, challenges that exist—and those that lie ahead. Rest assured, you're not alone! We'll be here along the way to provide guidance and resources to help you and all your students wade through the media waters.

We hope these resources serve as a way to help you take a proactive approach with your students and prioritize exploring, experimenting, and critically evaluating new technologies and their implications together.

Stay Informed: Top Media Literacy Resources

Stay updated on the ever-evolving world of media literacy. While Britannica remains a trusted source, there are several other noteworthy organizations leading the charge:

<div></div> <div>A leading community of educators aiming to make media literacy a valuable and widely practiced essential life skill.</div>	<div></div> <div>A nonprofit that champions high-quality media works to close the digital divide and ensure safe and equitable tech use.</div>	<div></div> <div>A grassroots movement that helps equip students with the literacy skills they need for health, well-being, and citizenship.</div>
<div></div> <div>A leading educational company that provides resources, approaches, and diverse perspectives to help navigate the complex world of education.</div>	<div></div> <div>A newly formed nonprofit that aims to reduce societal-scale risks from AI and explore AI ethics through research, field-building, and advocacy.</div>	<div></div> <div>A companion to CyberCivics, a middle-school digital literacy curriculum, this resource site is for adults who want to help youth use tech safely and wisely.</div>

Connect with Britannica

Media literacy’s importance extends beyond the classroom. It is a evolving skill that enables individuals to make informed decisions, participate in societal dialogues, and contribute to the collective well-being. By fostering media literacy, educators are preparing students to become responsible, informed, and engaged citizens in a rapidly changing world.

We can help! Connect with us to see how we can support your media literacy goals with trusted resources and professional learning services.

Glossary

Navigating the vast media, AI, and misinformation world can be daunting. Mastering the jargon isn't just handy—it's crucial. Equip yourself with our concise glossary that provides definitions from [Merriam-Webster](#) and other reliable sources. Afterward, test your knowledge with our [Media Literacy Crossword Challenge](#)!

- **Algorithms:** Step-by-step procedures for solving a problem or accomplishing a goal; a set of rules a machine (especially a computer) follows to achieve a particular goal.
- **Artificial intelligence:** The capability of computer systems or algorithms to imitate intelligent human behavior.
- **Bias:** An inclination of especially personal, prejudiced, or unreasoned outlook. In the case of AI and algorithms, these use human inputs and training data that may reflect programmer biases (even subconscious ones) and societal issues such as historical or social inequities.*
- **Data:** Information in digital form that can be transmitted or processed.
- **Deepfake:** An image or recording that has been convincingly altered and manipulated to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something that was not actually done or said.
- **Digital citizenship:** At [Britannica Education](#), we refer to this as a fundamental part of information literacy—the ability to navigate digital environments such as the Internet safely and responsibly and to engage respectfully in such spaces.
- **Digital footprint:** This is considered information that a person makes publicly available on the Internet.
- **Disinformation:** False information deliberately and often covertly spread in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.
- **Echo chamber:** A room with sound-reflecting walls used for producing echoing sound effects; often used figuratively to refer to an environment in which someone hears and pays attention mostly to opinions that fit their conclusions and ignore information that does not.
- **Fact-check:** Verifying the accuracy of information.
- **Generative AI:** AI technology capable of generating new content, such as text or images, in response to a submitted prompt by learning from a large reference example database; information often appears coherent, contextually relevant, and indistinguishable from that generated by humans but may in fact contain hallucinations—i.e., nonsensical or otherwise inaccurate outputs.†‡
- **Information:** The knowledge obtained from investigation, study, or instruction.
- **Lateral thinking:** A method of solving problems by making unusual or unexpected connections between ideas; exploring multiple sources and perspectives to understand the broader context and verify information.
- **Machine learning:** A subfield of AI, this method enables a computer to learn to perform tasks by analyzing a large dataset without being explicitly programmed.
- **Malinformation:** Genuine information that is shared with an intent to cause harm.†
- **Media:** Forms or systems of communication designed to reach or influence people widely.
- **Media literacy:** The ability to access, analyze, and evaluate information and its source. It also includes the ability to properly create, use, and act with various forms of media.§
- **Misinformation:** Incorrect or misleading information.
- **Source:** The point of origin for information, or a firsthand document or primary reference work.
- **Viral:** Being quickly and widely spread or popularized, especially by means of social media.

* Biases in AI definition adapted from [Harvard Business Review](#).

† Definition acquired from [First Draft News](#).

‡ Based on hallucinations definition adapted from [IBM](#).

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When Curiosity Leads, Learning Follows.



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