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United for Literacy
Littératie Ensemble

Literacy and Digital Media: Building the Road to Critical Thinking

Introduction

Literacy and Digital Media are a vast topic, and it seems new questions and concerns are raised every day. United for Literacy's 2026 national forum will attempt to answer some of these questions and share helpful tools and resources.

We engage with more information than ever before. Anyone can create content that may reach people all over the world. While this, in many ways, democratizes media and allows people to connect, it also raises questions of trust, truthfulness, and safety. In this forum, we will discuss how literacy helps to build critical thinking, which can help people, especially young people in high school and university, navigate digital media. We will also focus on people with lower literacy skills and those who face additional systemic barriers and discuss the impact of foundational literacy in the digital world.

While literacy and critical thinking in relation to digital media are essential for people at any age, for those who grew up with immediate access to the internet and mobile devices, the focus is a little different. While being a so-called digital native often includes feeling comfortable online and in using technology, it may also include assuming the digital world is a safe, reliable space where all content is equal.

At United for Literacy, we believe that literacy and numeracy shape every aspect of life. The ability to read, write, and use math has a deep impact on our well-being and supports greater equality and success. The stronger these basic skills, the easier it is to fact-check, ask necessary questions, and make connections; in other words, to think critically.

We believe that it is up to all of us, including practitioners, educators, and parents, to support youth as they build their agency to engage thoughtfully, make informed decisions, and participate confidently in digital spaces.

Discussion questions

Below are some questions to ponder in preparation for the forum. Other questions may arise during the discussion.

- What is the relationship between literacy and critical thinking?
- What are the tools and resources available to develop critical thinking skills?
- Why is critical thinking important when young people navigate digital media?
- How do young people navigate digital media today, and how do we gauge tone, context, and intent online?
- What roles can educators, families, and communities play in supporting critical thinking in digital spaces?

Topics for exploration

Fact versus fiction: How critical thinking can help make sense of all the information available online (e.g., avoiding scams; understanding that an opinion isn't always true and that many people are paid to have opinions online; and how AI-generated content can make misinformation appear credible at first glance).

Barriers to access and understanding: The impact that low literacy levels and overlapping social, economic, and cultural barriers can have on the ways people navigate digital media.

Tools and resources: During the forum, we will discuss tools, resources, and lived experiences about ways to navigate today's digital landscape. These resources will help educators, practitioners, and parents build their own critical thinking skills as well as those of the young people in their lives.

We invite you to join us to discuss this important issue.

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