

Literacy Definitions

What is literacy?

Literacy is important for all of us, no matter how old or young we are. Literacy helps us participate fully in family, work and community. Literacy is the ability to read, write and do mathematics, but it is also about problem solving, decision making, technology and social skills. The more literate we become, the better we understand our world. **Decoda**

“A renewed and expanded vision of literacy is essential for success. Such renewed vision admits that literacy is not confined to any particular age (childhood or adulthood), institution (i.e. the school system) or sector (i.e. education); that it is related to various dimensions of personal and social life and development; that it embraces a wide range of scenarios, strategies and means; and that it is a lifelong learning process.”

United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003-2012

“As the world becomes more complex, so too does the definition of literacy. It is evolving from a narrow definition to a broader view. Where once literacy was thought of as encompassing only basic reading and writing, perhaps at a certain grade level, we now accept a more complex and dynamic view of literacy – as enabling participation in family, work and community life. It is made up of essential and transferable social, cultural and academic practices and understandings, involving not only the communication skills of reading, writing and mathematics, but also problem solving, decision-making, technology and social skills. Literacy enables us to listen, view, communicate, represent and evaluate knowledge in many ways. The more literate we become, the greater our understanding of our world.”

From the 2008 Decoda Community Literacy Planning Guide

“The ability to understand and use printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” **Definition used by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education**

“Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society. “

UNESCO

Literacy & Essential Skills

Literacy skills are the essential building blocks for the development of a vibrant society and economy.

These foundation skills are embedded in activities in the home, school, community and workplace.

There is a continuum of development ranging from learning to read through to reading to learn a variety of other skills and perspectives on life.

The end of this continuum is the complex set of skills necessary for daily life, employment, citizenship, and personal advancement and enjoyment in our modern and diverse society.

Today, the broad definition of literacy includes a variety of skills: reading text, document use, writing, oral communications, numeracy, thinking skills, computer use, working with others and continuous learning. **From: Council of the Federation**