

# Visual Literacy 101

All of us, and especially our students, are living in a world where ideas are communicated visually. Although understanding, interpreting, and composing text will always be a critical type of literacy, the 21st century demands more of its citizens.

"Visual literacy is about interpreting images of the present and past and producing images that effectively communicate meaning to an audience." ([The Visual Literacy White Paper](#))

For an overview of the importance of visual literacy, watch [Visual Literacy across the Curriculum](#).

In today's connected world, images are part of almost every kind of communication. Websites use images and other media to inform, persuade, and entertain. Even interpersonal communication takes on an increasingly visual aspect as we send images via text messages and emails, post photos on social networking sites, and stay in touch with world events through microblogging tools, such as Twitter.

Thinking critically about what we see as well as what we read is part of being an educated, informed citizen, and while students may be experts at consuming and producing visual messages, they are probably not as proficient as they should be at doing this thoughtfully and productively. Instruction should include the following basic visual literacy skills throughout students' schooling in all subject areas:

- Analysis of images for content, point of view, purpose, and quality.
- Strategies for finding effective, relevant images.
- Knowledge of a variety of technologies and the ability to choose an appropriate method to communicate a message.
- Using basic graphic design principles to create powerful visual projects.
- Understand the legal and ethical laws and issues related to using images.

Activities that promote visual literacy can be incorporated naturally into existing curriculum. Since student projects in virtually every subject area and grade level often include a visual product, addressing visual literacy skills can easily be included in instruction and assessment. They can often even be part of content learning. Consider the following examples of classroom activities that could include some specific instruction in visual literacy:

- Students in a history class examine historical photos to interpret the content of the photos, the point of view of the photographer, and the context in which it was distributed.
- Math students create slideshows of geometric constructions they find in their community.
- Students document an inquiry project with photos and make them part of a science log that becomes part of a final presentation.
- In language arts, students find or take photos to represent the theme of a piece of literature.
- Research projects in any subject area include images to illustrate and explain a topic.

## Visual Literacy Resources

### [ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#)

Specific standards, performance indicators, and learning outcomes for visual literacy developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries.

### [Common Core in Action: 10 Visual Literacy Strategies](#)

A collection of classroom strategies connecting visual literacy to Common Core State Standards.

### [Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture](#)

A thoughtful paper that reflects on the kinds of skills that people need to have to participate fully in technology-based 21st century life.

### [Library of Congress: Using Primary Sources](#)

A collection of worksheets for students for analyzing primary sources including photos, maps, and other media.

### [Visual Literacy across the Curriculum](#)

A 3 minute, 45 second video introducing the topic of visual literacy in the classroom.

### [The Visual Literacy White Paper](#)

A summary of research and practice on visual literacy.

### [Visual Literacy Toolbox](#)

A collection of resources and lessons for teachers on visual literacy.

## For more information

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