

Continuity of Learning: Digital Literacy and Screen Time

Purpose

This support document details for SU/SDs, schools and educators the importance of teaching students digital literacy skills, provides considerations for screen-time use and makes the connection between digital literacy skills and productive screen time for students.

Introduction

As COVID-19 has shifted teaching and learning into remote and online learning environments, fostering student digital literacy has become critically important. While not a new concept, current conditions have brought digital literacy to the forefront. When Vermont educators, students and members of the community participated in the development of a [Vermont Portrait of a Graduate](#), digital literacy was identified as an expectation for career and college readiness. COVID-19 has brought increased attention to the need for our students to be digitally literate citizens in an increasingly online world.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy can be defined as the ability to effectively and critically navigate various digital platforms and understand, evaluate, and create content in order to communicate using a range of digital technologies. This definition aligns with the Vermont-adopted [International Society for Technology in Education \(ISTE\) Standards for Students](#) -- learners act as responsible, digitally literate citizens when they exercise ethical and moral decision-making skills while utilizing technology.

Digitally Literate students have the knowledge and understanding to:

Critically Navigate

Digitally literate students understand the importance of conducting information searches in a planned and organized manner. As active consumers of information, students develop an effective strategy to scan through multiple sources to verify what the expert consensus deems to be of value; the SIFT method (Scan, Investigate, Filter and Target) provides the student with a to-do list when looking at possible sources.

When students are digitally literate, they are also aware that multiple search engines exist for accessing information and different algorithms are used, producing different results. For example, searching while logged into a Google account would produce different results than a search when a student was not logged in. Digitally literate students are aware that searches

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create a digital footprint which can leave an unintentional trail of browsing history online. This passive footprint may reveal personal information about the student. It also opens the student up to being targeted by unsolicited digital information.

Evaluate

Digitally literate students have the ability to verify and select high-quality and trusted sources when searching for and utilizing information to produce work. They are also able to identify perspective and bias in media, data and digital resources -- including those that the students search for and those which have reached the students in an unsolicited manner. In a 2016 Stanford History Education Group [Evaluating Information](#) study, results indicated that more than 80% of middle school students could not tell the difference between an advertisement and a news article on Slate. The results were not considerably more promising for high school and college students. In this world of readily available information, today's students can easily maneuver between TikTok videos, Twitter and Instagram, but the ability to decipher real information from false information continues to prove challenging.

Create

Digitally literate students are both creators and recyclers of information. They can properly recognize and attribute the work of others, while repurposing and producing their own work from information culled from their research. According to [Common Sense Media](#), teens spend only three percent of their time creating new thing. Students benefit when a larger portion of their digital time is devoted to creating and producing original work. Students have a myriad of ways in which they can author material, including making and uploading videos, recording a podcast, animating a story, etc. It is important that they have the knowledge of proper tools and platforms that would be most helpful in creating and sharing work meant to achieve their goals.

Communicate

Digitally literate students understand the positive and negative impacts of communicating through technology. Digital tools open doors for learning and collaborating, allow for knowledge to be easily accessed, and provide a variety of platforms for students to reach their desired audience. These students understand that digital footprints are long-lasting, including those created by association with others. It has become commonplace for both universities and potential employers to vet candidates through their online reputations. Digitally literate students understand that online communication, whether it be a social media post, an email response or student-created work, needs to be assessed for impact and intent.

The simple use of capitalization and punctuation can affect the meaning when the subtleties of in-person facial expressions and body language are not available to assist in the messaging. The digitally literate student communicates in a manner that prevents messages and information from being misconstrued. Effective and responsible citizenship extends to digital communication and should be inclusive and not cause harm to the student or to others.

Considerations Regarding Screen Time

Educator concerns about the amount of time students are spending in front of a screen are understandable. As families and educators find themselves grappling with how to balance recommended screen time with the realities of ongoing distance and hybrid learning, it is important to consider the role of teaching digital literacy to students as a tool for managing (including self-managing) screen time.

In 2016, the [AAP revised their screen-time recommendations](#) to encourage parents to help their children become digitally literate and develop healthy media habits early on. These recommendations are separated into two categories: recommendations for children under the age of five, and those for children aged five and older.

- [Children under 5 years](#)
 - Birth to 18 months -- no screen time except video chatting with family/family friends
 - Between 18 months to 24 months -- limited to watching educational programming with parent/caregiver
 - Between 2 years and 5 years -- no more than 1 hour per day of educational and prosocial content, in addition to parental/caregiver engagement
- [Children between 5 and 18 years](#)
 - While the AAP's policy for children aged 5-18 includes a focus on prioritizing healthy behaviors -- such as an hour of exercise, eight to ten hours of sleep, family time, etc., -- **the policy does not have a standard screen-time limit.**

Despite conflicting and inconclusive results related to the detriment/benefit of screen time, researchers agree that how students spend time in front of a screen and what type of media they are engaging with is becoming just as important as the total amount of screen time. When students become active users of high-quality digital media, they lower their chances of becoming passive consumers of media and overexposure to screen time.

In accordance to the AAP's broader screen-time policy, families and educators should consider the following when determining appropriate screen access for children:

- What is the educational content of media being used?
- Do children have access to developmentally appropriate technological devices?
- How will students be using technology and media?
- How interactive is the technology and media being used?
- Is the technology and media open-ended in order to emphasize discovery learning?
- How does the programming/software/applications encourage creativity, problem solving and reflection?
- Is the technology being used in moderation to supplement, not replace, hands-on learning?
- How do school-related digital learning activities, including virtual lessons and educational technology use, factor into daily screen time planning and decision-making?

Technology has become essential during the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, families and educators need to contend with how to leverage high-quality, interactive media to meet the

academic, social, physical and emotional needs of students while balancing other needs. Digitally literate students benefit from the ability to make their own informed decisions about how to incorporate technology and media into their lives.

Resources

[American Library Association](#) (ALA)- The Public Library Association, a division of the ALA, provides digital literacy tutorials for librarians and end-users, as well as webinars for library staff.

[Teaching Tolerance Digital Literacy Framework](#)- The Teaching Tolerance Framework provides seven key areas in which students need support developing digital and civic literacy skills.

[International Society for Technology in Education](#)- ISTE supports educators in using and teaching technology through online learning, podcasts, professional learning networks, certification opportunities, as well as with standards for students K-12.

Sources

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National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAECP) and the Fred Rogers Center, [Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood programs](#)

Scholastic, [6 Online Research Skills Your Students Need](#)

Teach Thought, [12 Tips for Students to Manage their Digital Footprints](#)

Teach Your Kids Code, [How to Encourage Technology Literacy without Screen Addiction](#)

The New York Times, [They Loved your G.P.A then They Saw your Tweets](#)

Thoughtful Learning, [38 Ways Students Can Create Digital Content](#)

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University of Southern California, [7 Reasons Why Digital Literacy is Important for Teachers](#)