

Literacy in the 21st century has expanded

21st century literacies

Key questions

- What does it mean to be literate in the 21st century?
- What is the place of 'traditional' literacies?
- What are 'multiliteracies' or 'new literacies'?

Literacy in the 21st century demands the ability to move confidently, efficiently and ethically between a wide range of written and visual, print, live, digital or electronic text types according to purpose.

Traditional literacy governed by the language conventions of social and academic Standard Australian English remains important. Students learn to read and write increasingly sophisticated written print with fluency and comprehension being aware of how both writer and reader influence the interpretation of content.

Literacy in the 21st century has expanded to reflect social change, increasing specialisation and digital technologies. To be literate now requires the comprehension, selection and use of multimodal codes and conventions to interpret and express ideas, feelings and information. Subject-specific literacies are recognised that require the application of specialised communication knowledge and skills including information skills, as well as language used in creative and imaginative ways. The value of other dialects is embraced and accommodated.

The increasing complexity of modern communication gives rise to a number of distinct capabilities. These cross-curricular capabilities are the separate threads that, when combined, become what is recognised as 21st century literacy. Once called 'multiliteracies', but now generally referred to as 'new literacies', these broad skills include visual literacy, information literacy, cultural literacy and digital literacy. These new literacies work together with traditional print literacy to create the dispositions and capabilities that will enable students to approach, understand and use new text types, while at the same time, discovering their role and possibilities, as they inevitably arise within future communication technologies.

Key points

- Students need the knowledge and skills to adapt flexibly to the range of texts they will create and encounter in the future, including print texts and those types of texts arising from current and future technologies.
- 21st century literacies are a critical aspect of students' language and literacy education along with more traditional literacy skills.
- Teachers can make new literacies explicit to students by consciously and systematically incorporating them in English lessons as well as other learning areas, and through skilful and flexible classroom pedagogy.

Further information

For more information, including media queries, contact PETAA on +61(0)2 8020 3900 or publishing@petaa.edu.au

Resources to support teachers can be found on the PETAA website www.petaa.edu.au