

Reading, Writing, and Technology



New media, new literacies

When you hear the word *literacy*, do you picture a book? A magazine? A newspaper? Today, literacy means all these things—and more.

Our conception of literacy is rapidly changing. Advances in technology have provided us with word processors, e-mail, interactive websites, video games, podcasts, and DVDs.

These “new media” give us new ways to convey information. They also expand the definition of *literate* to include competence with devices and ways of communicating that did not exist a few years ago.

Children today certainly need to know how to read books and write with pen and paper. But they also must learn how to navigate and master new technologies. Many jobs now require workers to send and receive e-mail and use word-processing or information-gathering software.

As a parent or caregiver, you can help your child prepare for the literacy demands of tomorrow by seeking opportunities for him or her to become a proficient user of the Internet and related technologies.

The Internet and critical thinking

Surfing the Internet is fun for kids. It also strengthens important literacy skills.

Children reading online rely on critical thinking and research strategies to find the information they need. For example, a simple Web search requires students

to assess a list of suggested sites and then analyze Web content for relevance to the question at hand.

“The Internet is here to stay, so starting to develop these skills early gives children a good grounding in the skills that they’ll need their whole lives,” says Dr. Laurie Henry of the University of Kentucky.

Benefits of Internet reading

Unlike a paper book, the Internet offers dynamic texts with videos, audio, and links to different sites. There are many benefits to online reading:

- Interactive sites can match your child’s learning style: visual, hands-on, auditory.
- Websites offer context clues and organizing structures such as subheads, diagrams, and clickable definitions of unfamiliar terms, which help emerging readers develop stronger comprehension skills.
- Exploring websites makes children predict what they will read next. According to Dr. Julie Coiro of the University of Rhode Island, the very nature of hypertext, with information hidden underneath, compels kids to make many more forward inferences while reading than they ever make in paper books.

Interactive learning

As your child browses online—for fun or research—he or she is practicing critical skills. With help, your young reader can learn the strategies needed to tackle even more complex and difficult online tasks.

- *Correspondence*—Encourage your child to express his or her thoughts in e-mail to friends and family members. This provides excellent reading and writing practice in an informal, low-stress setting.



- *Author study*—Help your child learn more about a favorite author. Look up titles of other books by that author, and help your child send a letter or e-mail to the author or publisher asking about plans for future publications.
- *Critical thinking*—Do a Web search to gather information on a topic of interest to your child, such as a sport or hobby, a place your family has visited, or a historical figure. Review the search results with your child, talking about which sites may be reliable and interesting and which ones might not be as useful.
- *Precautions*—Teach your child to tell an adult immediately if he or she comes across something scary or inappropriate on the Internet. Caution against sharing personal information on the Web. Learn what parental controls are available through your Internet provider or additional software, and use them wisely.

A few great websites for parents

- ReadWriteThink.org offers free reading and language arts activities collected by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English: www.readwritethink.org/beyondtheclassroom/
- NoodleTools offers step-by-step tips for researching information online: www.noodletools.com
- Kidsites.com lists kid-safe sites by topic: www.kidsites.com

Tuned in to reading

Television and movies have been around longer than the Internet and probably have a worse reputation as time-wasters. However, better family viewing habits can help improve literacy.

- Join your child when he or she is watching TV. Share predictions about what will happen on the show, discuss the show during commercials, and talk about the show after it's over. These are basic strategies for developing comprehension.
- Find something in a show or movie that can serve as a springboard for reading. Borrow library books on the subject or do research online together to learn more.
- Ask your child to make up a story for a good TV show. Help your child write it down and have him or her draw the pictures. Or ask an older child to write it down and then read it—or act it out—for the family.
- Encourage older children to read books that have been adapted as movies, then watch the film and compare the two versions.
- Keep an atlas and dictionary close to the TV to look up unfamiliar words or places mentioned.

New opportunities to read and write

Reading doesn't just happen when your child holds a book. Used creatively with traditional reading materials, TV, the Internet, and other media can be assets in your child's quest for information and in boosting his or her reading and writing skills.



Reading, Writing, and Technology is one in a series of brochures produced in response to questions that parents frequently ask about their children's reading instruction. Single copies may be downloaded free at the Association's website, www.reading.org. Bulk copies may be purchased online or by telephone at 302-731-1600.

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- Enhance the professional development of reading educators worldwide
- Advocate for research, policy, and practices that support the best interests of all learners and reading professionals
- Establish and strengthen national and international alliances with a wide range of organizations
- Encourage and support research to promote informed decision making about reading practice and policy
- Provide leadership on literacy issues around the world

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