**What is literacy?[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Literacy is critical in helping us make sense of our world. From the time we wake up to the time we go to sleep, we are constantly making meaning of the world around us.

Literacy has traditionally been thought of as reading and writing. Although these are essential components of literacy, today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more. Alberta Education defines literacy as the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living. Language is explained as a socially and culturally constructed system of communication.

## Literacy with Young Children

From the moment child is born, his or her literacy journey begins. Children’s literacy abilities are nurtured through their families and communities. Examples are :

* the infant smiling or crying to communicate their needs to a parent
* the toddler forming their first words
* a young child interpreting the symbols around them
* a preschooler singing a song and
* a parent and child laughing over a story

## Literacy with School-age Children

As children enter the school system, there is a strong focus on the development of reading and writing skills. Children engage in learning opportunities that have them interacting with many different forms of text, in print and digital forms, using words, visuals and graphics. Students begin to learn

* the rules of language
* how to acquire information, evaluate it, and ethically use it
* how to construct meaning from various kinds of text and
* how to communicate effectively

As students move through the school system, they continue to refine all of their foundational skills as they explore a wider variety of texts and technologies. The vast amounts of information that are available through both print and the Internet and the ability to communicate with wide and varied audiences around the globe have expanded the ways our students read and communicate. Literacy for our students today also means preparing them to be critical and ethical consumers of information.

## Where Does Literacy Instruction Take Place?

Literacy development does not take place in just the Language Arts classroom. It is a shared responsibility among all educators. Although specific knowledge and skills are taught primarily in Language Arts, every subject area teacher is responsible for further developing, strengthening and enhancing literacy. Every subject area has its own unique literacy demands. Content area teachers know their subject matter and their programs of study. They are aware of the literacy requirements of their subject and understand that it is through literacy that meaning is made within their subject area content. Students need to be taught how to read different kinds of text, write and express themselves in the formats associated with each subject, and use content-specific vocabulary.

Literacy development occurs not only in school but in every aspect of daily life. We interact with others when we have a conversation. We read maps, advertisements, newspapers, recipes, manuals and websites. We analyze and interpret vast amount of media information. We write poems, songs, reports, blogs, and emails. Literacy opens the door to the world.

1. <https://education.alberta.ca/literacy-and-numeracy/literacy/everyone/what-is-literacy> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)