

CREATE to LEARN

INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL LITERACY



RENEE HOBBS

WILEY Blackwell

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HOBBS

CREATING REALITY to LEAD

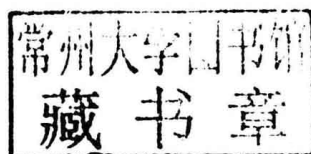
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Create to Learn

Introduction to Digital Literacy

Renee Hobbs

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Want to learn something well? Make media to advance knowledge and gain new ideas.

You don't have to be a communication professional to create to learn. Today, with free and low-cost digital tools, everyone can compose videos, blogs and websites, remixes, podcasts, screencasts, infographics, animation, remixes and more. By creating to learn, people internalize ideas and express information creatively in ways that may inspire others.

Create to Learn is a ground-breaking book that helps learners create multimedia texts as they develop both critical thinking and communication skills. Written by Renee Hobbs, one of the foremost experts in media literacy, this book introduces a wide range of conceptual principles at the heart of multimedia composition and digital pedagogy. Its approach is useful for anyone who sees the profound educational value of creating multimedia projects in an increasingly digital and connected world.

Students will become skilled multimedia communicators by learning how to gather information, generate ideas, and develop media projects using contemporary digital tools and platforms. Illustrative examples from a variety of student-produced multimedia projects along with helpful online materials offer support and boost confidence.

Create to Learn will help anyone make informed and strategic communication decisions as they create media for any academic, personal or professional project.

Learn more about this book at: www.createtolearn.online

Renee Hobbs is a Professor of Communication and Director of the Media Education Lab at the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island.

What to Expect in this Book

Today, every student needs to be able to create to learn.

Digital Literacy for Academic Success. If you want to learn something well, don't just listen, take notes, and sit for a test. Instead, create or make something where you must apply and use what you learn. Learning is an active process, and most people learn best through hands-on, minds-on experiences. When you have to express your knowledge using language, images, sound, and multi-media, you invest the effort needed to internalize what you are learning. Plus, the finished product may have value to others who may learn from it, too.

Critical Thinking about Media. All forms of information require careful interrogation of the author's claims, evidence, and assumptions. In this book, you will activate analysis skills by encouraging critical questions about the purpose, form, and content of all forms of communication and expression. Analyzing media involves understanding the text, context, and culture in which messages are produced and consumed.

Creativity and Collaboration. Express your developing understanding of any subject, idea, or topic by using podcasting, digital images, infographics and data visualization, remix, vlogs and screencasts, video production, animation, web sites and blogs, and social media to express and share ideas. In this book, you'll learn about the strategic process of creating with all nine of these media forms.

Life Skills for Career Success. Today, nearly every field and profession depends upon a workforce that has effective multimedia communication skills. Digital and media literacy competencies are essential for success in the workforce. After creating digital media projects to demonstrate the knowledge and skills you have acquired in college, you will be at a competitive advantage to others who have not learned to create media.

Interdisciplinary Connections. Digital literacy competencies are important for learners in all fields of study. This book introduces you to media literacy and digital literacy and provides compelling insights from the fields of communication and media, information science, education, and the arts and humanities.

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1

Create to Learn

KEY IDEAS

People learn best when they create. Creating media is a powerful way to demonstrate your learning. But it's also a way to generate ideas and transform static information into dynamic understanding. Today, the availability of free and low-cost digital production tools are contributing to a participatory culture where people are not just consuming media but also sharing, remixing, and creating. Although a college course can still rely on the exclusive expertise of one faculty member and one textbook, it's better when a course becomes a type of learning community where everybody learns from everybody. A learning community more closely models the kind of learning that happens in the workplace and contemporary society. To participate in a learning community, you can't just be a passive receiver of information. By creating and sharing media as a way to represent what you are learning, you can activate your intellectual curiosity in ways that naturally make learning more engaging and relevant.

You've grown up using the Internet. You may be comfortable with a variety of social media platforms that you access through your mobile phone, tablet, or laptop. You probably have a favorite way of using YouTube to support your interests in music and entertainment and you may participate in interest groups using Snapchat, Instagram, Reddit, Tumblr, or other platforms. Perhaps you're a gamer and engage in online social play with people from around the world.

But how skilled are you at using digital tools, texts, and technologies in the workplace or to advance your career? Most Americans admit that they're not as skilled as they need to be. More than 200 million US workers use digital skills on the job, but researchers have found that fewer than 1 in 10 feel proficient in the use of the digital tools and technologies they're required to use.¹ That's because, on average, the digital tools that we use change every two to three years. As digital products and platforms are rapidly proliferating, many people are challenged by the need to be lifelong learners when it comes to digital media and technology.

Today there is a *digital skills gap* as more and more people graduate from college without having had sufficient opportunity to develop competencies and habits of mind that are at the core of every job in a knowledge economy. According to management consultants, these core competencies include:

- **Attention management.** The ability to identify, prioritize, and manage in an increasingly dense information landscape involves strategic decision making about how and when to focus one's attention.
- **Communication.** The ability to use effective strategies for interacting and sharing information and ideas with others requires continual awareness of how, when, why, and what to communicate. This includes creating digital and multimedia documents, using language, image, sound, and interactive media effectively to express and share ideas.
- **Digital etiquette.** Awareness of privacy, legal, and security issues is essential to be effective in the workplace. The ability to use appropriate codes and conventions for communicating via e-mail, video conference, text message, and telephone also requires sensitivity to the ethical dimensions of social relationships in a networked age.
- **Search and research.** The ability to gather information and sift through it to identify what's relevant, trustworthy, and reliable demands a strong understanding of how information and authority is constructed in particular contexts. Tenacity and intellectual curiosity are a must in the search and research process.
- **Collaboration and leadership.** When people work together, they do many different things all working at the same time towards a shared and common goal. Skills of coordinating projects and organizing group activity are vital competencies for both workplace and citizenship in a democratic society.²

Knowledge Matters

Today, knowledge is not fixed and static. Knowledge is widely networked and distributed. As David Weinberger notes in his book, *Too Big to Know*, the smartest person in the room is the room. That is, in an era where anyone can access information, entertainment, and propaganda all at the touch of a fingertip, knowledge is less and less tied to expertise, authority, credentials, or public reputation. Indeed, anyone can start a cooking blog, not only someone trained at Le Cordon Bleu. Weinberger reminds us that before the Enlightenment, knowledge was understood as coming from God. Later, we placed our trust in the scientific method.³ Today, we've grown up experts who disagree with each other about every topic imaginable. The explosion of new knowledge made possible by the Internet, with the disappearance of gatekeepers and filters, has contributed to the rise of niche communities or *echo chambers*, where a small

group of people find comfort in their shared beliefs and attitudes. Indeed, it seems that the growing ease of access to information and entertainment is leading to both increased levels of apathy and political polarization.

Literacy Matters

When you hear the word literacy, you may think of the practice of reading and writing. But for a growing number of scholars and researchers, the concept of literacy is expanding as a result of changes in media, technology and the nature of knowledge. Today we define *literacy* as the sharing of meaning through symbols.⁴ Everyone – from all walks of life – needs to be able to create and share meaning through language, images, sounds, and other media forms.

The concept of literacy has been expanding for over 2,000 years. In Ancient Greece, a literate man was skilled in the art of rhetoric, possessing the ability to use public speaking to move the hearts and minds of other men in the Forum. All over the world, in medieval times, to be literate meant to be able to read from the holy books, and only a very few scholars and scribes were specially trained to be writers. Then the printing press changed the definition of writing as more and more people were able to read – and then write – as publishers found there to be a marketplace for romantic and adventure novels, personal essays, and scientific books. During the twentieth century, literacy expanded again with the rise of popular photography and people began using photographs for self-expression and communication. The terms visual literacy, information literacy, and media literacy developed as educators, scholars, artists, and librarians all recognized the need for new skills that mapped onto the changes in society that are reshaping the business, communication, and information landscape.

It's obvious how much images, sound, and interactivity combine with language as essential dimensions of the way people share and communicate ideas. It's simply not fair to put written language at the top of the pyramid and consider multimedia forms to be lesser than or inferior. As the National Council of Teachers of English stated in 2005, "All modes of communication are code-dependent. Each affects the nature of the content of the other and the overall rhetorical impact of the communication event itself."⁵ As a result, today the practice of acquiring, organizing, evaluating, and creatively using multimodal information is a fundamental competence for people in all fields of study and professions. Television programming, movies, and online videos are major sources of information and entertainment for people of all ages. Today, we see the integration of multiple modes of communication and expression in every part of life. Our social relationships with family and friends, leisure time, the workplace, and civic and cultural spaces all depend on the use of messages that skillfully combine image, language, sound, and interactivity.

What is Digital Literacy?

Digital literacy is the constellation of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for thriving in a technology-saturated culture. As information, entertainment, and persuasion are now shared digitally and personal, social and professional relationships are developed through interaction with social media as well as mass media and popular culture, people of all ages need the ability to *access, analyze, create, reflect, and take action* using a wide variety of digital tools, forms of expression and communication strategies.

Learning Matters

Learning is generally defined as the acquisition of skills and knowledge through experience, study, or teaching. When you think of learning, you may conjure up the routine practices of sitting in class, taking tests, and doing homework. If you were lucky, there was a teacher or two who recognized and appreciated your unique interests and talents. Perhaps you got to make a speech in class or compose essays on topics of your choice. If you were even more lucky, you got to create things – in art class, as a member of a robotics team, in the drama club, or even as a regular part of your coursework.

Learning happens through formal and informal means. During childhood and throughout life, *play* is a form of learning. Children learn by exploring their world, by using their imaginations, and by creating and building – using words, clay, paper and crayons, old blankets, and much more. During adolescence, we continue to play, learning by experimenting and taking risks as we discover ourselves (and the world around us) by doing things we have never done before. As we move into adulthood, we continue to learn on the job, by gaining experience through informal forms of *apprenticeship*. Throughout life, at every age, informal mentors and coaches help us learn as part of work and social life.

Today, people learn how to use digital technologies as an essential part of life. Digital media technologies are so much a part of our lives – for connecting to friends and family, for entertainment, and for learning. Just as the air, water, earth, nature, and architecture of the city are part of our physical environments, television, the Internet, music, celebrities, video games, and social media are part of our *cultural environment*. This term, developed by George Gerbner, refers to the set of beliefs, practices, customs, traditions, and behaviors that are common to everyone living in a certain population.⁶ Today, forms of digital and mass media are so much a part of our lives that many people would find it difficult to go a day without YouTube. As Mimi Ito and her

colleagues write, “The media and communication system underpins the spheres of work, education and commerce in ways that we increasingly take for granted.”⁷ If we think about digital media as a whole system, not as individual pieces of technology, then we see how vital they are to the lifelong learning process.

In higher education, there is a 1,000-year-old tradition of learning by lecture and memorization. Thus, educators have long relied on an approach to learning that depends on transmitting content knowledge verbally. Lectures and textbooks are primary tools in the college classroom. To be successful in many fields of study, students must gain knowledge through listening and reading.

But more and more, creating to learn is becoming an important part of higher education. At the University of Rhode Island first-year writing composition students worked in groups to brainstorm and create a public service announcement about the H1N1 virus.⁸ At the University of Massachusetts-Boston, in the Gateway Seminar Video Project, environmental science students worked in pairs to develop 16 videos that highlighted aspects of their learning, demonstrating how the issues impact their home city of Boston. Students developed videos with topics ranging from bleaching of coral reefs to shipwrecks to climate change and erosion.⁹

At Dartmouth College, teams of students taking a geography class created short video *mash-ups*, remixing bits of video and audio material from a range of sources, to introduce and explain a key concept related to a case study of ecology and development in Africa. In a course on political communication, students created ads to demonstrate their understanding of political communication strategy. Although few students in the class had previously worked with video equipment or editing prior to this class, they were able to produce effective work that helped them build real-world communication competencies while learning to apply key theoretical concepts.¹⁰

Every discipline or field of study involves creative work of one kind or another. When we think about the word “create,” we may think about concocting mixtures in chemistry lab or working in an art studio. In this book, you will be *creating to learn* by demonstrating knowledge and skills through creating a variety of forms of media – including web sites, infographics and data visualizations, vlogs animations, podcasts, memes, and more. But the idea of creating to learn goes deeper.

When we create media, we internalize knowledge deeply – we own it. *Internalization* is the process of consolidating and accepting ideas, behaviors, and attitudes into our own particular worldview. After all, if we can represent knowledge, information, and ideas in a format that makes sense to others, that’s a form of mastery. Actually, the time-honored practice of writing academic research papers is rooted in this idea. When students write a report or term paper or research paper, it’s based on the premise that you move through a complex process of identifying a question, gathering information and ideas,