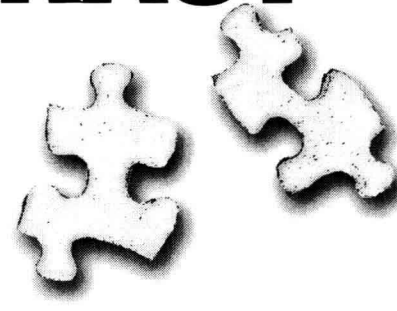
MEDIA LITERACY

W. James Potter

MEDIA LITERACY



W. James Potter

SAGE Publications
International Educational and Professional Publisher
Thousand Oaks London New Delhi

For information:

SAGE Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
M-32 Market
Greater Kailash I
New Delhi 110 048 India

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Potter, W. James.
Media literacy / by W. James Potter.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-7619-0926-5 (pbk.: acid-free paper.—ISBN 0-7619-0925-7 (cloth: acid-free paper)
1. Media literacy. I. Title.
P96.M4P68 1998
302.23—dc21 97-33726

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

98 99 00 01 02 03 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

Acquiring Editor: Margaret Seawell
Editorial Assistant: Renée Piernot
Production Editor: Astrid Virding
Production Assistant: Karen Wiley
Typesetter/Designer: Rebecca Evans
Indexer: L. Pilar Wyman
Cover Designer: Ravi Balasuriya
Print Buyer: Anna Chin

Preface for Faculty

Has this ever happened to you? You're in front of a class of undergraduates giving what you feel is one of your best lectures on media effects, history, economics, or content. A student raises her hand and asks politely, "I'm sorry, but I don't see how this information is important." You get a sinking feeling as you notice that several students nod in agreement.

At first you think that students are so focused on pursuing a career in the media that all they want is some information to help them get their first job as a disc jockey, a camera person, an assistant account executive or the like. There is so much you want to say. You want to tell them that the information you are presenting is more important than directions about which audio buttons to push or how to light a studio set or how to compute a CPM (cost per thousand). You want to make them realize that you are *educating* them for life rather than *training* them for a job. What may seem like irrelevant information is really part of a knowledge base they will need to draw on every day of their lives as they continuously interact with media, whether they work in one of the media industries or not.

But then you look at the text for the course and notice that it focuses on theories—a word that connotes to students that the information lives in a jargon-filled world of abstractions somewhere above them. Or, the text is overflowing with statistics and charts that glaze the eye and erode students' motivation to dig behind the facts to see the organizing perspectives. Or perhaps the text contains many interesting anecdotes that capture the readers' imaginations but leave them empty with a "So what?" feeling.

Then it hits you: "What we need is a text that will be broad enough to introduce the important information about the media without wandering off into a lot of detail about historical figures, statistics about content, or formulas about audience ratings. It should present a broad, well-integrated perspective that would orient students to the key issues, then serve as a foundation for all subsequent media courses. It should be reader friendly with a self-help tone so that students would recognize something on every page that they could use in their day-to-day interactions with the media."

These are the goals for this book, which has been in development over the past 4 years. During that time, it has been pilot tested in four undergraduate

classes and undergone several rounds of reviews by multiple reviewers. This process has generated extensive rewriting as a negotiation process between the compelling ideas in the research literatures and the needs of students. This process has been guided by five principles.

First, the book is not written to serve the special needs of a subgroup, such as parents, teachers, or policymakers. Instead, it is written to appeal to a more general audience that wants to think more deeply about the nature of the media, their messages, and their effects on both individuals and society. Also, its focus is not limited to one type of medium or one type of message.

As a college text, this book serves as a broad introduction that spans across many of the boundaries set up in academia to study the media. Some academic programs (such as journalism) focus on newspapers and magazines, whereas others (such as telecommunication and RTV) focus on radio and television. There are film studies programs, programs for recordings in music departments, book publishing in English or literature departments. Also, some programs focus on entertainment, some on information, and others on persuasive messages (marketing/advertising, political science, speech communication, or rhetoric). Some have a social science orientation while others take a cultural/critical approach. Some focus on industry skills (copy editing, reporting, lighting, directing, etc.) while others are more liberal arts programs with an emphasis on theory. Within each of these academic divisions, there is a special set of needs; but across all these divisions, there is the common purpose of educating students to be knowledgeable, well-functioning citizens within our media culture. This book presents an introduction or a kind of "Table of Contents" to the thinking that ties us together in this common goal of educating a media literate generation.

Second, the book is written from a critical perspective. This does not mean that it criticizes everything about the media. Instead, it means that it challenges commonly held beliefs about media effects, how the human mind works, media content, and opinions about the media themselves. The book also lays out arguments about why readers should be more skeptical, and it presents strategies for how readers can get more out of their media exposures. Thus, much of the information is not presented in a purely descriptive tone as is the case with most introductory textbooks. Instead, this book takes a critical perspective and presents arguments in which the information is presented as evidence to advance those arguments. Those arguments are not narrow, prescriptive ones where my purpose is to convince the reader that my perspective on the media is the only one or the best one. Rather, the book advances the arguments broadly to encourage readers to construct their own perspectives. Readers who find themselves disagreeing with my interpretations or extending them (or both) will be best illustrating the principles upon which this book is based.

Third, the arguments in the book are grounded in scientific research. The findings from this type of research cannot answer all our questions, but they can answer many of them. These findings are also useful for filtering out myths and demonstrating support for other speculations. This does not mean that a reader needs to be a statistician, a media theoretician, or a cognitive psychologist. When the book deals with statistics, theory, and psychology, it treats that information in a non-technical manner so that it is accessible to the general reader.

Fourth, in many places the book has a "self-help" tenor in the way it speaks directly to the reader. It presents guidance and practical exercises to help readers develop their own skills for dealing with media messages. Thus the book does not simply present information and leave it up to the students to memorize it or not. Instead, the book tries to sensitize readers to the importance of certain perspectives so that readers will be strongly motivated to explore the value of those perspectives by undertaking exercises. In this way, students have a greater probability of internalizing the key ideas in those perspectives, and that should motivate them to seek out more information in more advanced media courses.

Fifth, the book attempts to keep the focus more on knowledge structures than on individual facts so that readers can get a sense of "the big picture" of the media. Most students seem to be missing this. Their idea of the media is largely informed by their memory of images from television shows. Yet students often arrive at our courses with the belief that they know a great deal about the media because they have spent their lives sitting at an ever-expanding banquet of media channels, personalities, special effects, images, and genres, and they have acquired a great number of unprocessed facts—that is, they have a recognition of a wide variety of names, slogans, plot developments, and sound bites. However, much of this information is not particularly useful in helping them understand the media.

I have found, through knowledge pre-tests administered at the beginning of my courses, that many students lack even a rudimentary understanding of the media industries or their effects. Few students understand the economic nature of businesses or can define "profit." Few have a good idea of how old various media are and of the major influences that shaped their development. Few have any idea about how large the media are in terms of employment or revenue. Students also do not have a broad general understanding of the non-media world. Today, students' knowledge of geography, history, political systems, and economics is very sketchy, while their memory banks are crammed with popular culture images and infobits. More students know exactly what Sandra Bullock's fee for a movie is than know the name of either of the U.S. Senators from their home states. Fewer than half the students have even a close idea of the population of the country or of relative employment sizes of

different professions, nor have they developed any strategies to help them make good estimates of these things. Few have a good idea of actual crime rates, per capita expenditures on health care, or the relative costs of different government programs, but they have opinions about crime, health care reform, and government spending. When they form an opinion about something in the media or in society, the opinion is not deeply rooted in reasons; rather it is tethered only to shifting intuitive feelings. If we are serious about educating the next generation to function well in our changing society, we must recognize this challenge.

We have the formidable job of convincing students who have a voluminous knowledge of media and culture that while their knowledge base is miles wide, it is rarely more than an inch deep. That is, we need to help students assemble their knowledge into organized structures so they can see how things fit together and can identify where the gaps are.

As you can see from the five principles above, I am not interested in describing facts to help *train* students for entry-level jobs in a media company. Instead, I am more interested in *educating* students to live in our message saturated culture. Thus, the overriding goal of this book is to help students build their skills and knowledge structures to be more media literate.

But what does "media literacy" mean? This is a term that covers a great deal of conceptual ground. It can refer to the ability to use oral and written language (Maddison, 1971; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Sinatra, 1986), still and moving images (Messaris, 1994; Metallinos, 1994), television (Goodwin & Whannel, 1990), computers (Adams & Hamm, 1989), or to span across many different kinds of media (Silverblatt, 1995). It can be regarded primarily as a skill (Kulleseid & Strickland, 1989; Neuman, 1991) or as an accumulation of knowledge (Bianculli, 1992). It can be treated as a public policy issue (Aufderheide, 1993), a critical cultural issue (Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett, 1992), a set of pedagogical tools for elementary school teachers (Houk & Bogart, 1974), suggestions for parents (DeGaetano & Bander, 1996; Kelly, 1983), McLuhan-esque speculation (Gordon, 1971), or as a topic of scholarly inquiry from a physiological (Messaris, 1994), cognitive psychological (Sinatra, 1986), or anthropological (Scribner & Cole, 1981) point of view. In addition, it can focus primarily on one culture, such as American culture (Manley-Casimir & Luke, 1987; Ploghoft & Anderson, 1981), British culture (Buckingham, 1990; Masterman, 1985), or Chilean culture (Freire, 1985), or on several cultures (Scheunemann, 1996) or span across many countries and cultures (Brown, 1991; Maddison, 1971).

In conducting the research for this book, it became clear that there co-exist several schools of thought held by groups with different but definite ideas about how the term *media literacy* should be used. Four are especially prominent.

One group is composed of scholars who are interested in public policy and who argue for the importance of educating young children and adolescents

about the media. The tone of their writings is critical because the authors generally argue that the media are responsible for a range of negative effects on individuals and society—essentially by creating a false consciousness about our world. The audiences for their arguments are educational policymakers and other media scholars. These authors speculate about curriculum changes that need to be implemented in schools in order to address this problem. While some authors discuss particular instructional practices, these are presented as examples of their broad vision rather than as specific suggestions for teachers to implement.

Much of this tradition of thinking about media literacy is traceable to the work of British scholars such as Len Masterman, who wrote *Teaching the Media* (1985); David Buckingham, who edited *Watching Media Learning: Making Sense of Media Education* (1990); Manuel Alvarado and Oliver Boyd-Barrett, editors of *Media Education* (1992); and Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel, who edited *Understanding Television* (1990). Other scholars contributing important work to this tradition are Aufderheide (1993); Brown (1991); Freire (1985); Manley-Casimir and Luke (1987); McLaren, Hammer, Sholle, and Reilly (1995); and Ploghoft and Anderson (1981).

A second group includes scholars who are social scientists concerned with how people develop all the skills necessary for literacy with all kinds of media. The writings in this area are primarily intended to help the reader understand the skills involved in processing media messages. Some of these writings take a psychological point of view and focus on processing written and spoken language (Scribner & Cole, 1981) or visual images (Messaris, 1994; Sinatra, 1986). Others take a broader sociological (Silverblatt, 1995) or anthropological approach (Gordon, 1971).

A third group presents its viewpoint in handbooks that provide practical suggestions and exercises for parents (e.g., DeGaetano & Bander, 1996) and teachers (e.g., Houk & Bogart, 1974; Kulleseid & Strickland, 1989). These books are designed to help people work with children to increase their literacy in the various media (Adams & Hamm, 1989), especially television (Kelly, 1983).

A fourth group writes a popular-press type of criticism of the mass media and their effects on society and individuals. The primary targets of criticism are film (Medved, 1992) and television (Mander, 1978; Postman, 1984). However, some of the criticism is against the critics (e.g., *Literacy in the Television Age: The Myth of the TV Effect* by Susan Neuman, 1991, and *Teleliteracy: Taking Television Seriously* by David Bianculli, 1992).

Very important ideas have emerged from each of these groups of thinkers. I have been weaving these ideas together into an integrated whole as I develop my courses, in the belief that students will be able to achieve higher levels of media literacy if they are able to examine this concept from many different perspectives. I therefore try to show students the concept of media literacy from the perspective of a cognitive psychologist in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. Then,

in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, the media are examined primarily from the perspective of a critical scholar; of a historian in Chapter 9; of an economist in Chapter 10; of a political economist in Chapter 11; of a marketer in Chapter 12; a social scientist in Chapters 13 and 14; and a sociologist in Chapter 15. The first two and the last two chapters of the book work to integrate the major perspectives in the middle of the book.

The book is composed of 18 chapters that are organized into four parts: Introduction, Skills, Knowledge Structures, and Putting It All Together. Each chapter begins with an outline and a thesis statement, which is the key idea of that chapter. Each chapter includes at least one exercise that students can either do at home to help them apply the ideas in the readings, or do in class as a stimulus to group discussions. At the end of most chapters, there is a short annotated bibliography of several additional readings that students could pursue to extend and deepen their knowledge of the topic of that chapter.

The book has some boundaries that must be acknowledged. First, it is focused entirely on United States media. Second, I do not present the information in this book as the definitive set of all things a person needs to know to be highly media literate. The book is more a table of contents than an encyclopedia. It is a beginning point for getting organized and building substantial knowledge structures. It is also a plan of action to help readers orient themselves in their continuous development of media literacy skills.

Third, and finally, I try to blend the insights from the critical perspective with the social scientific perspective. Social scientists will likely feel uncomfortable with the critical tone of some of the sections, and critical scholars will undoubtedly feel that statistical information is being wrongly privileged in places. However, I feel that taking the risk of attempting a blending of information from the two different worldviews is worthwhile if students (who are largely unaware of this academic distinction) are able to see a broader perspective on the media, their content, and their effects.

References

Adams, D. M., & Hamm, M. E. (1989). *Media and literacy: Learning in an electronic age: Issues, ideas and teaching strategies.* Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Alvarado, M., & Boyd-Barrett, O. (Eds.). (1992). *Media education: An introduction.* London: BFI Publishing.

Aufderheide, P. (1993). *Media literacy: A report of the national leadership conference on media literacy.* Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

Bianculli, D. (1992). *Teleliteracy: Taking television seriously.* New York: Continuum.

Brown, J. A. (1991). *Television "critical viewing skills" education: Major media literacy projects in the United States and selected countries.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Buckingham, D. (Ed.). (1990). *Watching media learning: Making sense of media education.* New York: Falmer.

DeGaetano, G., & Bander, K. (1996). *Screen smarts: A family guide to media literacy.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation.* South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Goodwin, A., & Whannel, G. (Eds.). (1990). *Understanding television.* New York: Routledge.

Gordon, D. R. (1971). *The new literacy.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Houk, A., & Bogart, C. (1974). *Media literacy: Thinking about.* Dayton, OH: Pflaum/Standard.

Kelly, M. R. (1983). *A parents' guide to television: Making the most of it.* New York: John Wiley.

Kulleseid, E. R., & Strickland, D. S. (1989). *Literature, literacy, and learning.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Maddison, J. (1971). *Radio and television in literacy: A survey of the use of the broadcasting media in combating illiteracy among adults.* Paris: UNESCO.

Mander, J. (1978). *Four arguments for the elimination of television.* New York: William Morrow.

Manley-Casimir, M. E., & Luke, C. (Eds.). (1987). *Children and television: A challenge for education.* New York: Praeger.

Masterman, L. (1985). *Teaching the media.* London: Comedia.

McLaren, P., Hammer, R., Sholle, D., & Reilly, S. S. (Eds.). (1995). *Rethinking media literacy: A critical pedagogy of representation.* New York: Peter Lang.

Medved, M. (1992). *Hollywood vs. America: Popular culture and the war on traditional values.* New York: HarperCollins.

Messaris, P. (1994). *Visual "literacy": Image, mind, and reality.* Boulder, CO: Westview.

Metallinos, N. (Ed.). (1994). *Verbo-visual literacy: Understanding and applying new educational communication media technologies.* Montreal, Canada: 3Dmt Research and Information Center.

Neuman, S. B. (1991). *Literacy in the television age: The myth of the TV effect.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Ploghoft, M. E., & Anderson, J. A. (Eds.). (1981). *Education for the television age.* Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Postman, N. (1984). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business.* New York: Penguin.

Scheunemann, D. (Ed.). (1996). *Orality, literacy, and modern media.* Columbia, SC: Camden House.

Scribner, S., & Cole, M. (1981). *The psychology of literacy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Silverblatt, A. (1995). *Media literacy: Keys to interpreting media messages.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Sinatra, R. (1986). *Visual literacy connections to thinking, reading and writing.* Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Interesting Reading

Adams, D. M., & Hamm, M. E. (1989). *Media and literacy: Learning in an electronic age: Issues, ideas and teaching strategies.* Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas. (197 pages)

Adams and Hamm, who come from an educational technology background, offer a very applied approach to media literacy. They lay out some techniques that they suggest teachers can use to increase literacy in their students. The book is scholarly (although on the low end) with its acknowledgment of some of the communication and education literature. There are chapters on teaching mathematics, on computer literacy, and on moral development. There is little factual material or findings from research studies.

Alvarado, M., & Boyd-Barrett, O. (Eds.). (1992). *Media education: An introduction*. London: BFI Publishing. (450 pages with index)

Alvarado and Boyd-Barrett's edited volume contains 63 short essays organized into four sections: Development and Traditions of the Subject of Media Education; Key Aspects of Media Education; Analyzing Classroom Performance; and Practical Issues of Practice, In-Service Training, Strategies, and Media Education Across the Curriculum. All the contributors are British and attention is on how media education should be incorporated into the curriculum in order to educate people between the ages of 4 and 18.

Aufderheide, P. (1993). *Media literacy: A report of the national leadership conference on media literacy*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute. (37 pages)

This is a report of a meeting held in December 1992 by several dozen Americans concerned about the need for teaching media literacy in the nation's public schools. They derived the following definition of media literacy: "it is the ability of a citizen to access, analyze, and produce information for specific outcomes" (p. v). They recommend that "emphases in media literacy training range widely, including informed citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence" (p. 1).

Brown, J. A. (1991). *Television "critical viewing skills" education: Major media literacy projects in the United States and selected countries*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (371 pages including index)

Brown tries to inventory the range of systematic projects that have developed integrated curricula and long-range projects in media education with an emphasis on television. His audience is educators who are trying to design and implement their own media education projects at all levels: grade and high school, college, and adult education, as well as in local, regional, and even national interest groups.

Buckingham, D. (Ed.). (1990). *Watching media learning: Making sense of media education*. New York: Falmer. (234 pages with index)

Buckingham's edited book of 10 chapters deals with various aspects of media education in Britain. The main questions addressed are: What do students already know about the media? How have students learned what they already know? What should students know about the media?

DeGaetano, G., & Bander, K. (1996). *Screen smarts: A family guide to media literacy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. (206 pages with appendices and index)

Written by two teachers, this is a book for parents who are concerned about what their children are learning (or not learning) from television. The authors observe that "we are taught how to read and write, but we are not taught about visual images—how they work, how they affect us, and how we can use them for our purposes" (p. xv). The book is full of practical suggestions and exercises for parents and children. There are in-depth treatments of media violence, advertising, and stereotypes, as well as of news and talk shows.

Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey. (211 pages including index)

Freire is a Chilean social critic and educator. He treats literacy as a political problem, training teachers to investigate the life and vocabulary of the community. When people can read they are empowered to access more information, but when they read they must have a critical attitude toward the text and not accept it at face value.

Goodwin, A., & Whannel, G. (Eds.). (1990). *Understanding television.* New York: Routledge. (192 pages with index)

Goodwin and Whannel's book contains 12 chapters, primarily by British cultural scholars who teach about television to college students. These essays comprise a text that the authors use to introduce their students to the history, social context, and textual interpretation of television.

Gordon, D. R. (1971). *The new literacy.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. (190 pages with index)

Gordon argues that the Three Rs are no longer sufficient for literacy in the new media environment. In this rather McLuhan-esque book with its changing type faces, odd graphics and eye-catching use of white space, the author raises issues more than he provides prescriptions or definitions.

Houk, A., & Bogart, C. (1974). *Media literacy: Thinking about.* Dayton, OH: Pflaum/Standard. (115 pages)

Houk and Bogart's book was written for teachers of media literacy in public schools. The authors offer many creative suggestions to teachers.

Kelly, M. R. (1983). *A parents' guide to television: Making the most of it.* New York: John Wiley. (129 pages)

This is a practical handbook. It is very thin on information and research findings with only 17 research studies cited in the entire book. Instead, Kelly focuses on providing parents with lots of suggestions about how to interact with their children while they are watching television.

Masterman, L. (1985). *Teaching the media.* London: Comedia. (341 pages including annotated bibliography and appendices)

Written for teachers of media, this book addresses the questions: Why teach about the media? What are the best ways to teach about the media? Why are media texts the way they are? Masterman seeks to present a set of general principles for teaching about any mass medium.

McLaren, P., Hammer, R., Sholle, D., & Reilly, S. S. (Eds.). (1995). *Rethinking media literacy: A critical pedagogy of representation.* New York: Peter Lang. (259 pages)

This edited volume contains seven chapters by different college professors. It concludes with an discussion among the four authors on the topic of strategies for media literacy. The chapters are critical of the media and argue for an activism.

Medved, M. (1992). *Hollywood vs. America: Popular culture and the war on traditional values.* New York: HarperCollins. (386 pages)

Film critic Medved argues that Hollywood has a value system that is very different from that of mainstream America. He says that Hollywood glorifies the perverse, ridicules all forms of mainstream religion, tears down the image of the family, and glorifies ugliness with violence, bad language, and America-bashing—and then is puzzled by decreasing attendance and increasing criticism.

Messaris, P. (1994). *Visual "literacy": Image, mind, and reality.* Boulder, CO: Westview. (208 pages)

Paul Messaris, a communications professor at the University of Pennsylvania, argues against some commonly held assumptions about visual literacy. For example, he rejects the notion popular among many scholars that there can be no objective standards for judging the reality of visual images. He says that there are generic cognitive skills that people apply when they

experience the pictorial media. His notion of training people to be media literate focuses on helping viewers detect unrealistic visual manipulation.

Metallinos, N. (Ed.). (1994). *Verbo-visual literacy: Understanding and applying new educational communication media technologies*. Montreal, Canada: 3Dmt Research and Information Center. (276 pages)

The 38 chapters in Metallinos's volume are from a symposium of the International Visual Literacy Association. The chapters focus on suggestions about how best to use the emerging new technologies to foster verbal and visual literacy.

Postman, N. (1984). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. New York: Penguin. (184 pages with index)

Postman presents a strong, well-written argument about how the media, especially television, have conditioned us to expect entertainment. Because our perceptions of ideas are shaped by the form of their expression, we are now image oriented. We respond to pleasure, not thought and reflection.

Sinatra, R. (1986). *Visual literacy connections to thinking, reading and writing*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas. (307 pages)

Richard Sinatra, a professor in human services and counseling at St. John's University, argues that visual literacy is primary to more developed forms of literacy, such as oral language literacy and written language literacy. Many of the arguments in his book are rather technical. For example, he provides an in-depth treatment of the topic of how the human brain processes verbal and visual information.

Preface for Students

Has this ever happened to you? You're sitting in class listening to a professor lecture about the media, and you wonder: How can I memorize all this information? There is so much! How much of this will I be expected to know?

This feeling is a symptom of several needs. Perhaps you need to be convinced that learning the material is worthwhile because it will be useful to you in your life; if you are committed to learning something, it will come much more easily to you. Perhaps you think the information is valuable, but there appears to be too much; in this case, you need some way to organize it all. For example, it is a formidable task to memorize 30 brand new facts, but if you can arrange them into six bundles of five facts each, then they are easier to learn. Better still would be to organize them into a branching structure where the most important idea is regarded as the trunk of a tree and four or five ideas branch off directly from that main idea. Each of those branches has its own four or five extending ideas. Such a structure would be a valuable tool to keep you organized when you are exposed to yet another 30 or even 300 new facts. The structure would orient you to where to place the new information so it could be easily retrieved when you need it for a test, a class discussion, or formulating an opinion years after the class is over. Knowledge structures are very important tools in helping us acquire new information, organize that information, and retrieve that information when we want to use it.

How good are your knowledge structures about the media and the culture they reflect? Let's make a quick assessment and find out. At the end of this Preface, there is a Media Literacy Quiz. This short quiz (it will take you about 10 to 15 minutes) is not a test of the entire extent of your knowledge structures. Instead, it is a small sampling of information that will help you diagnose where your knowledge structures are strongest. Try to answer as many questions as you can, but don't be upset if you leave some blank or get them wrong. Remember, the results are for your eyes only. Okay, turn to the end of the preface, and take the Media Literacy Quiz.

Let's see how you did. In Part I—the Media Industries—you could have earned 29 points. If you earned more than 20 points, you probably have a broad knowledge of the media industries. If you earned fewer than 10 points,

you've got some gaps in your knowledge of the size and structure of the media industries.

In Part II—Media Effects—don't focus on how many effects you were able to list. Instead look at the variety of those effects. Are they all negative effects or are there also some positive ones on your list? Are the effects all immediate ones or did you also include effects that take weeks or even years to show up? Are they all effects on your behaviors, or did you also include effects on your attitudes, values, learning of facts, bodily functions, and ability to appreciate art or life? The greater the variety of effects you were able to list, the better your knowledge structure about effects.

In Part III—Media Content—were you surprised by some of the answers? You have watched over 10,000 hours of television programming so far in your life, and you remember lots of specific characters, plots, and show tunes. But are you focusing on the "trees" rather than the "forest"? That is, is your memory so focused on individual characters and shows that you are missing the overall patterns in the television world?

Part IV—Perceptions of the Real World—may seem like a strange component for a media quiz, but much of this information comes to you from the media and may not be very accurate. When this information is good, it gives you a solid foundation for your opinions about education, government, families, health, and crime. If you scored more than 20 points on this section, you probably have a good knowledge base about the real world. More important than the number of points you scored, however, are the patterns of your estimates. Are you able to think logically and construct good estimates even when you don't know the real figures? The patterns of your estimates will show you something about the skills you use. For example, look at your answers to Questions 16 and 17 together. I've had people answer that 60% of the population has not graduated from high school and that 70% of the population has a college degree. That adds up to 130%. The only way this is possible is if millions of high school dropouts also have college degrees. Even though you may not know the answer to either of these questions, it is still possible to be reasonable with estimates. Let's take another example. Look at your estimates for Questions 21 and 28. I've had people estimate that the population of this country was 100 million people, and that the annual birth rate was 50 million. That would mean that over the past 2 years alone, 100 million people were born—which is their estimate of the total U.S. population. Where did all the people over 3 years old come from?

Finally, in Part V—Name Recognition—look at where you earned your points. If you are like most people who take this quiz, you are more familiar with media personalities than with the people who are behind the scenes in the media or with real-world figures.

Now think beyond your scores on the individual sections of the quiz and ask yourself: Could my knowledge base be stronger? If the answer is yes, then read on!

This book is composed of 18 chapters that are organized into four parts: Introduction, Skills, Knowledge Structures, and Putting It All Together. The introductory chapters ask you to confront the questions: *Should* I work on developing my knowledge about the media? Why is this important? How can I get started? In Chapter 1, I present a definition of media literacy that spreads out across a range of skills and knowledge. No one is totally non-media-literate, because everyone has some knowledge and skills. Also, no one is completely media literate, because knowledge continually changes, and our skills can always be improved.

Chapter 2 is designed to show you that media literacy is at a fairly low level in this culture and that this is a problem about which we should be concerned. We live in a media saturated environment where we must filter out almost all of the information that comes to us in order to be able to function in our society. We may be screening out too much, however, which would leave us with a set of faulty beliefs about the media and society.

Part II deals with the skills required for media literacy. Most of you have developed formidable skills for memorizing bits of information so you can do consistently well on exams based on objective knowledge. Yet the skill of memorizing, while useful at times, is less than what you need to be media literate. The higher level skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and problem solving can help you make much more efficient use of your time and can help you see the "big picture."

Chapter 3 reveals how our understanding of the human mind has changed. Psychologists have moved away from mechanical models of logical processing of information toward more open-ended, intuitive models, such as the use of schemas—sets of facts that allow us to organize information. Given the unsystematic, unconscious way we process much of the media information, Chapter 4 makes an argument for more formal processing by developing the skills of analysis, comparison/contrast, evaluation, synthesis, and appreciation.

A developmental perspective on skills is taken in Chapter 5. In psychology, the developmental perspective is generally limited to a focus on children's cognitive development. Chapter 5 expands this focus to look at development into adulthood along the cognitive, emotional, and moral dimensions.

Each of the 11 chapters in Part III helps you build knowledge structures about the media industries, their messages, and their effects. Of course, these chapters cannot give you all the information you need to have well-developed knowledge structures on these topics, but the chapters can orient you to what is important and help you structure your approach to fleshing out your

knowledge with additional reading and study. The first three of these chapters examine the essence of different types of messages found across all the media: Chapter 6 examines the news—Is it possible for news to be objective, given all the influences and constraints on journalists? Chapter 7 focuses on advertising messages—How has the increase in the number of advertising messages changed the media industries and other businesses? Chapter 8 examines patterns of entertainment programming—What kinds of characters, portrayals, and themes are most prevalent, and what are the message conventions that shape this content?

The next four chapters will help organize your knowledge structures about the media industries. Chapter 9 helps you see the media industries from an historical perspective. It presents a highlight reel of each medium to show the patterns they have all followed in developing into the powerful giants they are today. An economic perspective is shown in Chapter 10, with each of the mass media industries profiled in terms of its revenues, expenses, and profit margins. Chapter 11 shows patterns of ownership and control of the mass media companies. Each medium is examined separately, then cross-media ownership patterns are explored. Chapter 12 takes a marketing perspective, as the nature of the audience is presented through the eyes of industry decision makers. The view of the audience has changed drastically from the days of seeing it as a mass.

The next three chapters deal with the effects of the media. Chapter 13 will help you expand your vision of what constitutes a media effect. Effects are both long term and immediate. Not only can they affect our behavior, but they also have profound influences on us cognitively, affectively, and physiologically, and these effects are positive as well as negative.

Chapter 14 looks at how the effects processes work on us. These processes are hardly ever simple or direct. More often, the media work in concert with many other factors that each serve to increase the probability that an effect may occur. When we take a broader perspective on effects, we can more accurately assess the influence of the media in our lives.

In Chapter 15, the influences of media are examined in terms of changes in the fundamental institutions of politics, family, religion, and sports. The media, especially television, have forever altered the way these institutions function, which means that the media exert indirect effects on us through these institutions.

Chapter 16 illustrates why a broad knowledge about the real world is as important as a thorough knowledge about the media industries. Real-world knowledge helps us check whether the media are presenting a balanced picture of society. While this chapter cannot present a full inventory of the real-world knowledge a person needs, it presents some examples (such as in the