

## Why media literacy?

For centuries, “literacy” has referred to the ability to read and write. But these days, we get most of our information through complex combinations of text, images and sounds – especially through television, computers and the Internet. It’s still important to be able to read and write, but it’s no longer enough. *Media literacy* – the ability to critically consume and create many kinds of media – is essential.

Media literacy skills can help children, youth and adults:

- Understand how media messages create meaning
- Identify who created a particular media message
- Recognize what the media maker wants us to believe or do
- Name the “tools of persuasion” used
- Recognize bias, spin, misinformation and lies
- Discover the part of the story that’s not being told
- Evaluate media messages based on their own experiences, beliefs and values
- Create and distribute their own media messages
- Become advocates for change in our media system

Media literacy education helps to develop critical thinking and active participation in our media culture.

*In schools:* Media literacy skills are included in the educational standards of every state -- in language arts, social studies, health, science and other subjects. Teachers know that students love to examine and talk about their own media, and they’ve found that media literacy is an engaging way to explore a wide array of topics and issues.

*In the community:* Researchers and practitioners recognize that media literacy education is an important tool in addressing alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; obesity and eating disorders; bullying and violence; gender identity and sexuality; racism, discrimination and oppression; and life skills.

*In public life:* Media literacy skills help us understand how media shape our culture and society, and how the “media monopoly” – the handful of giant corporations that control most of our media – affects our democracy. Media literacy encourages and empowers youth and adults to advocate for change in our media system.