

Title: Is a Picture Really Worth a Thousand Words?

Presenter:

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Learning Objectives:

Viewers will gain:

1. an awareness of what visual literacy entails
2. a raised consciousness of the importance of visual literacy to information literacy
3. increased ability to consider the visual as well as the contextual when evaluating media of all forms.

What is visual literacy? What is information literacy? How can these be related? After all, doesn't 'information' imply knowledge, or subject matter; while 'visual' implies the looks, or description of something?

Let's look at definitions of these terms, as presented by the National Forum on Information Literacy (<http://www.infolit.org/definitions.html>)

“Information Literacy: The ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand.”

“Visual Literacy: The ability, through knowledge of the basic visual elements, to understand the meaning and components of the image.”

For the term Visual Literacy, we can also look at the definition by the International Visual Literacy Association, which states “Visual literacy as defined by the International Visual Literacy Association is "a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visual actions, objects, and/or symbols, natural or man-made, that are [encountered] in [the] environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, [we are] able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, [we are] able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communications" (Fransecky & Debes, 1972, p. 7)”

(<http://www.ivla.org/organization/whatis.htm>)

With the rise in multiple media through which information is becoming available (i.e, graphical, aural, textual), there are new challenges in evaluating the information. When looking at a graphical work, or a work that contains or relies on the visual layout, one needs to no longer evaluate solely on the basis of intellectual content, but also on how the information is presented.

ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (Association of College and Research Libraries of the American Library Association in 2000) state, in part:

Standard One ("The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed"), Performance Indicator 2, "The information literate student identifies a variety of types and formats of potential sources for information." The Outcomes include, (a) "knows how information is formally and informally produced, organized, and disseminated"; (c) "Identifies the value and differences of potential resources in a variety of formats (e.g., multimedia, database, website, data set, audio/visual, book)." These indicate a need not only to be aware of the formats materials may be available in, but how the information is laid out so as to better identify where potential sources of information of a particular type might be. By knowing how the information is laid out, how the information is visually presented, can help the patron to better understand the values and differences of potential resource media formats.

Standard Four ("The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose"). Performance Indicator 1 "The information literate student applies new and prior information to the planning and creation of a particular product or performance." The Outcomes include (a) "Organizes the content in a manner that supports the purposes and format of the product or performance (e.g., outlines, drafts, storyboards)"; (d) manipulates digital text, images, and data, as needed, transferring them from their original locations and formats to a new context."

Standard Four, Performance Indicator 3 "The information literate student communicates the product or performance effectively to others." The Outcomes include (a) Chooses a communication medium and format that best supports the purposes of the product or performance and the intended audience; (b) uses a range of information technology applications in creating the product or performance, (c) Incorporates principles of design and communication, and (d) communicates clearly and with a style that supports the purposes of the intended audience."

Information literacy competency standards for higher education. (2000). Retrieved March 15 2007 from <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm>

National Forum on Information Literacy. Retrieved March 15 2007 from <http://www.infolit.org/definitions.html>

IVLA What is visual literacy? (2002). Retrieved March 15 2007 from <http://www.ivla.org/organization/whatis.htm>

What does all this mean for you when you are trying to teach information literacy? It means that you should not only focus on the content of the material (which is indeed very important, and should be kept at the forefront), but you should also look at the presentation of the material as well. Sometimes a deciding factor might very well be the media in which the information is presented.