Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

The Framework for Visual Literacy in Higher Education

Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, April 6, 2022

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Introduction

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) groups and task forces regularly review existing literacy guidelines and standards.[1] As a component of this revision, these groups were asked to align existing literacy standards and guidelines with the 2016 *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*.[2]

Literacy Standards Task Force (VLTF) was convened for this purpose.

While some see visual literacy as a concern limited to the fields of art, architecture, and design,[5] visual information is truly multidisciplinary in nature.[6] Visuals can include but are not limited to charts, drawings, graphs, icons, maps, memes, paintings, photographs, symbols, or other visualizations, as well as multimodal texts[7] with visual elements.[8]

Visual literacy definitions differ among disciplines. The definition below, from the 2011 *ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, is commonly used in the context of librarianship:

> Visual literacy is a set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media. Visual literacy skills equip a learner to understand and analyze the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components involved in the production and use of visual materials. A visually literate individual is both a critical consumer of visual media and a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture.[9]

Students across higher education must have opportunities to develop critical and ethical ways of engaging with visual information in order to become discerning citizens in today's image-saturated society. To create a companion document that reflects this approach to visual literacy, the VLTF conducted empirical research from 2019-2021, interviewing stakeholders in a range of roles and disciplines.[10] The goal of this study was to identify what these practitioners perceived to be important trends, challenges, and opportunities for visual literacy.

Informed by the study's findings, we identified four emerging themes for learning in visual literacy. These themes form the structure of this companion document:

Learners form strategies as su8l

How to read this document

We chose not to group our knowledge practices and dispositions[12] according to the frames of the *Framework for Information Literacy*. Instead, we suggest potential connections between the knowledge practices and dispositions within each of our themes and the frames of the 2016 *Framework*. In the document below, these potential connections are denoted as follows: Authority Is Constructed and Contextual [AICC], Information Creation as a Process [ICaaP], Information

[4] Association of College Research Libraries (ACRL), "ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," October 2011,
http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/standards/visualliteracy.pdf.
[5] What Is Visual Literacy?" *Visual Literacy Today*. June 3, 2021.
https://visualliteracytoday.org/what-is-visual-literacy/
[6] Frank Serafini, "Visual Literacy," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, February 27, 2017.
https://oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-19
[7]

093.43,21.

Implement a range of principles and strategies for accessibility in visual media, including alt text, complex image descriptions, and audio description of visuals in video, among other techniques. [ICaaP] [IHV] [SJ]

Prioritize ethical information practices for use, attribution, and remix when they conflict with aesthetic preferences or creative objectives for visuals. [IHV]

Dispositions

Learners who are developing their visual literacy abilities:

Acknowledge that receiving feedback about visuals is a valuable step in the creation process. [ICaaP] [SaC]

Appreciate that creation, dissemination, selection, and use of visuals may be mediated by economic factors, including compensation for creators, material production costs, licensing, and associated publication fees. [IHV] [ICaaP] [SJ]

Consider the varying role of visuals in disciplinary scholarship, examining evolving trends and standards for communication impact, style, purpose, creator intent, and audience reaction. [AICC] [Sacs]

Cultivate an appreciation for visuals from cultures that are not their own, respecting the value of visual materials to creators and their communities. [IHV] s391 0 Td Tc -0.005 Tw 5.674 0 T

Knowledge Practices

Learners who are developing their visual literacy abilities:

Examine visuals for signs of alteration, such as cropping or use of digital filters, and consider the intent and consequences of any changes made. [AICC] [ICaaP]

Examine visuals slowly and deeply in order to develop and refine critical observation

Consider if creation and/or use of a visual will constitute misappropriation, which dissociates visuals from their original contexts and deprives individual creators and cultural communities of agency and credit. [ICaaP] [IHV] [SJ]

Cultivate an appreciation for visuals from cultures that are not their own, respecting the value of visual materials to creators and their communities. [IHV] [RaI] [SJ]

Identify as both consumers and creators of visuals, acknowledging how positionality, bias, experience, and expertise inform the interpretation and communication of visuals. [AICC] [ICaaP] [IHV] [SJ]

Identify as contributors to a more socially-just world by intentionally and ethically including a diversity of voices in their visual media projects. [ICaaP] [IHV] [RaI] [SaC] [SJ]

Prioritize ethical considerations for cultural and intellectual property when creating, sharing, or using visuals. [ICaaP] [IHV] [SJ]

Recognize how incorporating accessibility practices and principles can enrich the experience of visuals for all users. [ICaaP] [IHV] 2-6[SJ][Sa)-23.6 (S)r]

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