

# Re-Envisioning the *ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*

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on behalf of the ACRL Visual Literacy Task Force

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## What are the standards?

- The Visual Literacy Standards approach visual literacy from an information literacy perspective but also address the unique characteristics of visual materials. The Visual Literacy Standards are informed by the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000) and are intended to complement them.
- The Visual Literacy Standards were the first of their kind **to describe** interdisciplinary visual literacy **performance indicators** and **learning outcomes**. These learning outcomes provide a framework for student visual literacy learning and offer guidance for librarians, faculty, and other academic professionals in teaching and **assessing** visual literacy.

# Visual Literacy Defined (2011)

- 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.

## Visual Literacy Defined (2011)

- In an interdisciplinary, higher education environment, a visually literate individual is able to:
  - Determine the nature and extent of the visual materials needed
  - Find and access needed images and visual media effectively and efficiently
  - Interpret and analyze the meanings of images and visual media
  - Evaluate images and their sources
  - Use images and visual media effectively
  - Design and create meaningful images and visual media
  - Understand many of the ethical, legal, social, and economic issues surrounding the creation and use of images and visual media, and access and use visual materials ethically

# Visual Literacy Standards (2011)

## Standards, Performance Indicators, and Learning Outcomes

### Standard One

The visually literate student determines the nature and extent of the visual materials needed.

#### *Performance Indicators:*

1. The visually literate student defines and articulates the need for an image.

#### *Learning Outcomes:*

- a. Defines the purpose of the image within the project (e.g., illustration, evidence, primary source, focus of analysis, critique, commentary)
  - b. Defines the scope (e.g., reach, audience) and environment (e.g., academic environment, open web) of the planned image use
  - c. Articulates criteria that need to be met by the image (e.g., subject, pictorial content, color, resolution, specific item)
  - d. Identifies key concepts and terms that describe the needed image
  - e. Identifies discipline-specific conventions for image use
2. The visually literate student identifies a variety of image sources, materials, and types.

#### *Learning Outcomes:*

- a. Explores image sources to increase familiarity with available images and generate ideas for relevant image content
- b. Investigates the scope, content, and potential usefulness of a range of image sources and formats (e.g., digital, print, subscription databases, open web, books or articles, repositories, personal creations)
- c. Identifies different image and visual media types and materials (e.g., paintings, prints, photographs, born-digital images, data models)
- d. Articulates ways images can be used to communicate data and information (e.g., charts, graphs, maps, diagrams, models, renderings, elevations)
- e. Recognizes that existing images can be modified or repurposed to produce new visual content

# The ACRL Visual Literacy Task Force

- In 2018, the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) Image Resource Interest Group (IRIG) convened the Visual Literacy Task Force to update the [ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#) (2011) and align the standards with the [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education](#) (2016) which replaced the Information Literacy Standards (2000).

# The ACRL Framework Framework (2016)

## ACRL Framework Structure

For each threshold concept:

- Explanation of concept
  - Knowledge practices
  - Dispositions
- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
  - Information Creation as a Process
  - Information Has Value
  - Research as Inquiry
  - Scholarship as Conversation
  - Searching as Strategic Exploration

### Information Has Value

Give credit to the original ideas of others through proper attribution and citation.  
Recognize your opportunity for multiple roles – as a contributor or a creator  
as well as a consumer of information.

What is the  
purpose of this  
information?

Who has  
access to this  
information,  
and who  
does not?

Is the material  
licensed in a  
specific way  
that promotes  
or prohibits  
reuse?



Information possesses several dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means to influence, and as a means of negotiating and understanding the world. Legal and socio-economic interests influence information production and dissemination.  
[ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, 2015]

# Why?

- Finding images, evaluating sources, and using images ethically are all skills aligned with *traditional* information literacy goals.
- Moving towards *critical* understanding of images and visual materials to address artificial intelligence, augmented reality, disinformation, open access, social media, social justice, and new visual media types (born-digital images, digital reproductions, data visualizations, multi-modal creations, etc.).



## Working Internally

- The task force revisited the 'definition problem' of visual literacy and examined definitions of digital literacy, digital visual literacy, information literacy, media literacy, and metaliteracy as well as the ideas of critical literacy and fluency.
- The task force also examined recent scholarship in the fields of visual communication, visual culture, and visual literacy.
- The task force investigated librarians' use and perception of the current standards.
- Members of the task force started the draft process, including transitioning from empirical assessments, benchmarks and checklists to conceptual frameworks with threshold concepts and learning dispositions.

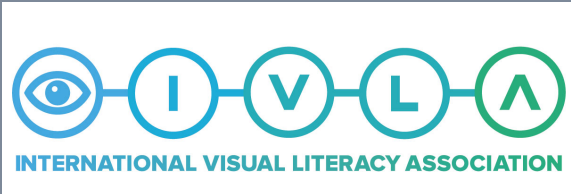
# Working Externally

- Empirical research study using qualitative, email interviewing
- To determine:
  - how scholars use images and visual media in their work,
  - how these same individuals define visual literacy in the twenty-first century,
  - how they educate others about visual literacy,
  - and what skills and competencies they see as crucial in order for their students to be considered visually literate in the twenty-first century.

# Interview Questions

1. How do images and/or visual media figure into your work or research?
2. Describe your own path to visual literacy.
  - a. Did you receive formal training in how to read, interpret, and contextualize visual materials? Whether yes or no, please elaborate.
3. How do you define visual literacy?
4. Consider the following definition of visual literacy:  
*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.*
  - a. Is this definition sufficient for 21st-century learners? If not, how would you improve it?
5. Does educating others figure into your work?
  - a. If so, how?
6. What visual literacy skills and competencies do you consider necessary for success in your discipline?
7. What do you consider to be the unique visual literacy concern(s) or challenge(s) for students or audiences in your area of expertise?
8. Is assessing the visual literacy competencies of others part of your work?
  - a. If so, could you elaborate on your assessment methods?
9. What do you consider to be the most pressing concern(s) (e.g. credibility, diversity, equity, inclusion, manipulation, technology, and/or trust) surrounding images and/or visual media today? Please explain your reasoning.
10. How do you see new technologies (such as augmented reality, deep fakes, etc.) affecting our understanding of visual literacy?
11. What challenges and opportunities do you see for the field of visual literacy moving into the 21st-century?

# The Role of the



If you would like to share your thoughts or be included in our research study, please email me @ [dthompson29@murraystate.edu](mailto:dthompson29@murraystate.edu)

Thank you!

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