

## Shmoop Digital Literacy Curriculum Introduction and Outline

### What Is Digital Literacy?

“Digital Literacy” and “its importance for preparing citizens for a global economy” (Do these sound familiar? We didn’t even copy and paste, the sound bytes just came to us in a recurring dream) get tossed around more than beach volleyballs at a tournament.

In other words, you don’t need anyone beating you over the head with *why* digital literacy matters, so let’s unpack *what* it is first, and try to make sense of all the different definitions floating around out there in cyberspace.

According to Paul Gilster in his famous book *Digital Literacy*,<sup>1</sup> digital literacy is “the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers” (p. 1). Sounds simple enough. What if we swoop and Shmoop? That is, swoop in and Shmoopify it so that you can talk about it with your students in a language that resonates with them.

*Shmoop’s version:* You know you’re digitally literate if...

- 1) you can plop your pretty self down in front of your computer, Smartphone, or tablet;
- 2) find the info you *need* and *when* you need it;
- 3) understand what you’re looking at, whether it’s text, pics, videos, or all of the above; and
- 4) use what you find to get your tasks on.

The University of Illinois<sup>2</sup> has another great definition of digital literacy, that it is the following:

- “The ability to use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information.”
- “The ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers.”
- “A person’s ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment... Literacy includes the ability to read and interpret media, to reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, and to evaluate and apply new knowledge gained from digital environments.”

*Shmoop’s Version:* Okay, so now we’re getting more specific. To be digitally literate, you not only need to be able to gather info from a whole bunch of digital sources, but also be able to figure out whether it comes from legit sources and it’s true. If you’re spot on about this, then you can use it responsibly and honestly (no plagiarizing) to report what you’ve found. This means, you can read and make sense of what you find online, toss out what’s wrong or false, and use what sticks to create new and awesome stuff.



<sup>1</sup> Gilster, P. (1997). *Digital Literacy*. New York: Wiley and Computer Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.library.illinois.edu/diglit/definition.html>, September 10, 2011.

## Why Should I Care?

Shmoop confession: we're techies. Big-time. We're glad that's out in the open. Huge relief.

In short, not only do we care about digital lit, but it's pretty much our lifeblood. So we care, but why does anyone else? Hmm, let's see... More and more jobs every year fall into the technology sector; the growing digital divide – both at home and all over the third rock from sun – between those who have and understand e-access and those who don't; and finally, the fact that information is moving online *en masse*.

It's hard out there for a paperback reader. Google Books, Kindle, and iPads make millions of texts available at our fingertips. Gone are the days of looking up information in the many volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Today, research information resides primarily on large databases online that make everything available, from journals to books to photos and videos.

And what about all the fun stuff that's now online and saves us time and money as we keep in touch with our amigos around the world? Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Tumblr, Skype, YouTube, and so on. We mean, really, even Grandma and Grandpa are on Facebook these days.

But true digital literacy is about a lot more than being able to access information and knowing how to "friend" someone. Being digital literati is not only about quantity, but also quality. In other words, it's not enough to find 900,000 articles on a topic with an uber-general Google search. Students need to be skilled at narrowing down searches so that they are useful, figuring out how to separate what's true and accurate from what isn't, and knowing how to use and synthesize what they find without plagiarizing.

Facebook and Twitter (and even texting) are also not just about fun and games. With great access comes even greater responsibility. Not only do young people need to know how keep themselves safe online (from yes, rando creepers, we're talking to you), but also how to keep others safe, and not become cyberbullies or other e-monsters.

Okay, we can stop now. We hope you're sold.

It's not just a Shmoop or a US thing either. Countries and governments all over the world are all aflutter to prepare their global citizens to function in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Digital literacy is more than a sound byte; it is a necessary skill to not just exist, but to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In short, that's why you should care about digital literacy, and if you're reading this, we know you do. Now let's talk about why you should care about Shmoop's take on the subject, and what challenges and opportunities arise in teaching students digital literacy.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Okay, let's talk about the elephant in the room first. For something as useful and fun as digital literacy, the *teaching* of digital literacy can be less than titillating. Yes, we said it. A lot of attempts at engaging students with digital lit have been, well, less than engaging. So what's up with that?

To begin with, it's easy to feel like students know a lot of things already, especially about online social networks. It leaves us all wondering where to start. In digital literacy, more than other less dynamic subjects, constant communication between instructor and students is key. Whether it's checking in about whether students have an embarrassing email address, have overshared on their Facebook profiles, or have been friended by randos online, the onus is on instructors to keep gauging the pulse of their group, and adjust materials accordingly. The silver lining: young people love to talk about online use and drama, so with the right questions, these conversations should be pretty fun and very useful.

Another issue is that a lot of digital literacy content is very techie and not necessarily guaranteed to keep students glued to the edge of their seats. We have tried to combat this doldrum by making our activities interactive, group-based, and hands on. Literally. So rather than lecturing students about the dangers of online predators, you'll find them working with their friends through real-world scenarios of "do I accept this person as my friend or not?"

Next up, the swamp issue: there is just *sooooo* much stuff to teach about digital literacy, and it grows every day. We have done our absolute best – technie scout's honor – to make our curriculum as comprehensive as possible. Really and truly. At least for a middle school crowd. (We can talk with students about Linked In and using the Internet to look for jobs a little later.) Finally, our content is aligned with Common Core Standards and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Framework. So onwards and e-upwards!

## Shmoop Curriculum Outline

We include an outline of all the activities in this curriculum here. Our curriculum is divided into five modules, which take students from an Internet intro, to more complex affairs: using social media; staying safe online; participating in an online community responsibly; gathering, evaluating, and using information effectively; and making connections to what they're learning in the classroom.

We present a suggested sequence for modules, units, and activities, and recognize that you will adjust this for your particular student group and classroom. We alert you as to how long we guesstimate that activities will take. Many of them are about an hour long, and can be extended or shortened to fit your class schedule.

### Module I. Getting Started

#### *Unit 1– Using Internet Browsers and Email*

- **Day 1, “Media Map: What’s Up With Your Usage?”**  
35-40 minutes for students to work together and figure out the who, what, where, when, and why of their own digital media worlds.
- **Day 1, “Browser Basics: The Places You’ll ‘Go’ and the Pop-Ups You’ll Block”**  
A 20-25-minute run-through of browsers and blocking annoying pop-up ads.
- **Day 2, “Using Email and Google Docs”**  
A one-hour introduction to Gmail, shared Google Docs, and the Google world we live in

### Module II. Digital Track(ing): Safety, Privacy, Digital Footprints, and Oh Yeah, Some Fun Too

#### *Unit 2 – The Basics of Social Media*

- **Day 1, “Fbk 2.012: Managing Your Profile and Privacy”**  
A one-hour intro to the do's, don'ts, and must's of using Facebook and the like.
- **Day 2, “Communicating with One to One Million People: Blogs and Instant Messaging”**  
A one-hour introduction to blogging, messaging, and abbreviated forms of communication.

#### *Unit 3 – Internet Privacy and Security*

- **Day 1, “Without A (Big) Trace: Managing Your Digital Footprint”**  
A one-hour activity where students analyze, research, and put together their own “digital dossiers, ” based on real information they find about themselves online.
- **Day 2, “Keeping It Real (Secret): Creating Strong Passwords and Avoiding Tricks”**  
A one-hour session focused on to how to protect private information online.

#### *Unit 4 – Internet Safety and Ethics*

- **Day 1, “The Golden Rule Goes Online: Preventing and Stopping Cyberbullying”**  
An hour-long activity during which students define and identify different types of cyberbullying, and learn how to avoid being the victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying.
- **Day 2, “Oh No, You Didn’t!: Internet Dangers and Strategies for Staying Safe”**  
In this one-hour activity, students role-play scenarios around communicating safely online and how to handle risky situations.

### **Module III. Deep Stuff: Doing the Right Thing Online**

#### *Unit 5 – Online Community, Culture, and Citizenship*

- **Day 1, “The Ties That Bind: How to Be a Good Online Citizen”**  
A one-hour activity during which students consider how to be a good online citizen and build positive online communities.
- **Day 2, “E-Organizing for a Better World: Internet Activism”**  
An hour-long activity during which students explore the ways that people across the globe are using the Internet to organize around common causes, and consider which causes are important to them.

### **Module IV. WWW: World Wide What, Where, When, Why, and How**

#### *Unit 6 – Online Research and Keyword Search Techniques*

- **Day 1, “Research Basics: Where in the World (Wide Web) Is...?”**  
An hour-long intro to conducting quality research online.
- **Day 2, “Key(word)s to your Heart: Google Search Tips”**  
A one-hour activity on improving your Google search techniques.

#### *Unit 7 – How to Evaluate a Website*

- **Day 1, “Fact or Fiction: How to Decide What Sites Keep It Real”**  
Over the course of this hour-long activity, students develop basic guidelines for evaluating whether to trust online sources, then they take their news skillz (yes, with a z) for a test drive using some sample sites.
- **Day 2, “Fact or Opinion: How to Judge a Website's Biases”**  
During this one-hour activity, students delve more deeply into assessing the biases and research utility of site content, using specific examples.

### *Unit 8 – Using and Citing Online Sources*

- **Day 1, “Chicken or the Egg: Primary and Secondary Sources”**  
An hour-long activity during which students learn the difference between and uses of primary and secondary sources.
- **Day 2, “In Plain Cite: How to Credit Others’ Work”**  
A 60-minute run-through of different citation styles and how to cite resources from books to websites.

### *Unit 9 – Using Copyrighted, Creative Commons, and Public Domain Materials*

- **Day 1, “Is It Legal?: Copyright, Fair Use, and Creative Commons”**  
During this hour-long session, students learn when and how they can use copyrighted, Creative Commons, and public domain materials.
- **Day 2, “Mixin’ It Up: Using and Modifying Creative Materials”**  
Students put their learning to the test during this one-hour activity, which allows students to create a mash-up masterpiece of original work, Creative Commons images, and a public domain story.

## **Module V. Classroom Webs: Content Area Lessons**

### *Unit 10 – ELA Online: Digital Literacy Connections to English Language Arts*

- **Day 1, “Twilight Activity: The Cullen Cars”**  
A one-hour activity during which students learn about the symbolism of the cars in *Twilight* through online research. Students also cite sources and explain how they know their sources are legit.
- **Day 2, “Facebook or Twitter Plot Summary”**  
During this 60-minute activity, students use their social networking know-how to create plot summaries of books in the form of Facebook status updates or Tweets.

### *Unit 11 – Social Studies Online: Digital Literacy Connections to Civics and History*

- **Day 1, “To Speak or Not to Speak... Freely”**  
During this hour-long activity, students learn about a real-life case in which a student got in trouble for a Tweet, research the right to free speech, and then debate whether or not this kerfuffle was a case of free speech being unfairly restricted.
- **Day 2, “Civil War Uniforms”**  
An hour-long activity that allows students to research the crazy array of Civil War uniforms, then redesign the uniforms of their local National Guard.