# What is media literacy, and why is it important?

# Common Sense Media

The word "literacy" usually describes the ability to read and write. Reading literacy and media literacy have a lot in common. Reading starts with recognizing letters. Pretty soon, readers can identify words -- and, most importantly, understand what those words mean. Readers then become writers. With more experience, readers and writers develop strong literacy skills

Media literacy is the ability to identify different types of media and understand the messages they're sending. Kids take in a huge amount of information from a wide array of sources, far beyond the traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines) of most parents' youth. There are text messages, memes, viral videos, social media, video games, advertising, and more. But all media shares one thing: Someone created it. And it was created for a reason. Understanding that reason is the basis of media literacy.

The digital age has made it [easy for anyone to create media](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/news-and-media-literacy/where-do-fake-news-generators-come-from). We don't always know who created something, why they made it, and whether it's credible. This makes media literacy tricky to learn and teach. Nonetheless, media literacy is an essential skill in the digital age.

Specifically, it helps kids:

* **Learn to think critically.** As kids evaluate media, they decide whether the messages make sense, why certain information was included, what wasn't included, and what the key ideas are. They learn to use examples to support their opinions. Then they can make up their own minds about the information based on knowledge they already have.
* **Become a smart consumer of products and information.**Media literacy helps kids learn how to determine whether something is credible. It also helps them determine the "persuasive intent" of advertising and resist the techniques marketers use to sell products.
* **Recognize point of view.** Every creator has a perspective. Identifying an author's point of view helps kids appreciate different perspectives. It also helps put information in the context of what they already know -- or think they know.
* **Create media responsibly.** Recognizing your own point of view, saying what you want to say how you want to say it, and understanding that your messages have an impact is key to effective communication.
* **Identify the role of media in our culture.** From celebrity gossip to magazine covers to memes, media is telling us something, shaping our understanding of the world, and even compelling us to act or think in certain ways.
* **Understand the author's goal.**What does the author want you to take away from a piece of media? Is it purely informative, is it trying to change your mind, or is it introducing you to new ideas you've never heard of? When kids understand what type of influence something has, they can make informed choices.