



# 7 Literacies

for  
Thriving

in a  
Sustainable World

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## Overview

The 7 Literacies provide a well-examined foundation for a holistic understanding of the human condition and for individual thriving in a globally sustainable way. Each of the 7 Literacies provides an essential perspective on the human condition and serves as a natural gateway to the other Literacies, together providing a holistic understanding of the human organism. In providing multiple but integrated perspectives, the Literacies are an invitation to examine the process and purpose of human knowledge acquisition—the goals of an education—and from there to build a new foundation for understanding what it means to be a human being in the world today. Thus, while the Literacies in themselves are not areas of knowledge nor skill sets as represented by traditional academic disciplines (such as ecology or social studies), they do serve as a foundation for assimilating disciplinary knowledge and skill sets. Moreover, this foundation is self-motivated and self-generated because the consideration of any one literacy is a natural segue to the others.

## The Literacies

**1. REASON LITERACY-** Productive dialogue—the sharing of information—depends on mutually agreed-to rules of discourse and consensus about what constitutes information or knowledge. Six components of the **REASON** acronym (**R**easoning, **E**valuate, **A**rgument, **S**hare, **O**perate, **N**ature of Knowledge) invite us to consider the sources and reliability of knowledge (e.g., through reasoning) and effective ways of sharing knowledge (e.g., forming a sound argument). It is also the basis for a productive “dialogue” with our selves, for assessing the coherence of our private narratives.

**2. SELF LITERACY-** Ultimately, because all knowledge is assimilated, evaluated, and acted upon by an individual or a ‘self’, we need to understand our own psychological makeup in order to grasp the origins of and influences on our behavioral choices. In effect, **SELF LITERACY** invites each of us as a subject to become the object of our exploration. The same methods we use to acquire knowledge about the external world can be turned inward to understand the self, and thus to explore how our minds are built and function, both as members of the human species and as individual selves. This process of self-exploration reveals the sources of our emotions, thinking and action—both conscious and unconscious—and uncovers our personality characteristics, aptitudes and talents, personal values, beliefs and attitudes.

**3. ECOLOGICAL LITERACY-** Humans, like all other life forms, are an integral part of the Earth’s ecosystems. Like other life forms, we use and transform energy, and thus contribute to ecological change. As a result, ecosystems are dynamic and changing, rather than static, harmonious, or in a state of balance. Moreover, ecosystem impact by humans is *intrinsically* neither good nor bad—a value judgment that can only be made with regard to the cost or benefit of a particular impact on a given life form. Thus, if humans wish to thrive

sustainably, every person will need to be mindful of the survival value of crucial ecosystem services and energy resources and of the utility—including the aesthetic-psychological benefits—of landscape composition and species assemblages.

**4. ECONOMIC LITERACY-** Once we understand our intimate physical and psychological connection to and dependence on ecological resources, we become mindful of the necessity of their sustainability. Indeed, sustainable resource management applies equally well to all limited resources, including material goods, personal energy and time, and social relationships. Ultimately, ECONOMIC LITERACY is about the mindful harvesting and expenditure of limited resources across the lifespan of individuals and whole societies. It naturally brings into play how to fairly share resources held in common, the significance of resource ‘ownership’ by individuals and societies, and the effects of individual use or abuse on others.

**5. CULTURAL LITERACY-** In the same way that our bodies are specialized for moving about on two limbs, our brains are specialized for social life. We develop best and for all our lives we flourish best when we are emotionally connected to others and function as valued and productive members of a society. In turn, social relationships and the local cultures in which we participate, shape our thinking, our values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. In effect, they shape our worldview, which includes our personal identity and our view of and regard for others from different cultures and with different worldviews. When we become mindful of ourselves as contributors to and products of a cultural milieu, we become more appreciative of cultural diversity and more actively engaged in the discovery of shared interests and purpose.

**6. CIVIC LITERACY-** As members of a society, we each have expectations and responsibilities. Our expectations include certain socially-constituted personal freedoms and rights (e.g., “liberty and the pursuit of happiness”, protection from crime), while our responsibilities include obedience of socially-constituted laws, and service for the public good. When we become mindful of these civic expectations and responsibilities, we are inclined to look for opportunities to improve the public good (e.g., enhanced social justice) through group collaboration and leadership, collective action and creative problem solving.

**7. GLOBAL LITERACY-** In the intimately connected 21<sup>st</sup> C and beyond, human flourishing in any place will depend on human flourishing everywhere. In simplest terms, no one person’s actions or inactions are without effect on others, and often on a larger scale than anticipated or imagined (e.g., via the world wide web). This requires an acute awareness of one’s behavior on a potentially global scale. If we are to realize human flourishing on a global scale, then we must find ways to more efficiently steward our local and global resources. Human global competition, while a driver for innovation, cannot be a zero-sum game, where one nation’s gain is another’s loss. Instead, global competition will need to be embedded in a globally collaborative network working for the common good.



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