

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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*.<sup>2</sup>

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,<sup>5</sup> visual information is truly multidisciplinary in nature.<sup>6</sup> 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<sup>7</sup> with visual elements.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> The goal of this study was to identify what these practitioners perceived to be important trends, challenges, and opportunities for visual literacy.<sup>9</sup>

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

## How to read this document

We chose not to group our knowledge practices and dispositions<sup>12</sup> 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 [ICaP], Information

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<sup>4</sup> 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>.

<sup>5</sup> What Is Visual Literacy?" *Visual Literacy Today*. June 3, 2021.

<https://visualliteracytoday.org/what-is-visual-literacy/>

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup>





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]

## 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

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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[~~S~~][Sa]-23.6 (S)r]

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