

# The Visual Literacy White Paper

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## What is visual literacy?

Visual communication is a process of sending and receiving messages using images. **Visual literacy** can be defined as the "ability to construct meaning from visual images" (Giorgis, Johnson, Bonomo, Colbert, & al, 1999: 146). To make meaning from images, the 'reader' uses the critical skills of exploration, critique and reflection. Lapp et al (1999) use the term "intermediality" to describe the combined literacies needed to read in a multi-media world. They stress the importance of active reading based on information visualisation and the importance of visual communication to capture attention, reinforce knowledge and increase audience responses. **Visual literacy is about interpreting images of the present and past and producing images that effectively communicate the message to an audience.**

The term "visual literacy" was first used by the writer John Debes in 1968 (1968). Messaris (1995) defines visual literacy as the gaining of knowledge and experience about the workings of the visual media coupled with a heightened conscious awareness of those workings. Visual literacy includes the group of skills which enable an individual "to understand and use visuals for intentionally communicating with others" (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1978: 291). Visual literacy is what is seen with the eye and what is 'seen' with the mind. A visually literate person should be able to read and write visual language. This includes the ability to successfully decode and interpret visual messages and to encode and compose meaningful visual communications.

Visual literacy involves developing the set of skills needed to be able to interpret the content of visual images, examine social impact of those images and to discuss purpose, audience and ownership. It includes the ability to visualise internally, communicate visually and read and interpret visual images. In addition, students need to be aware of the manipulative uses and ideological implications of images. Visual literacy also involves **making judgements** of the accuracy, validity and worth of images. A visually literate person is able to discriminate and make sense of visual objects and images; create visuals; comprehend and appreciate the visuals created by others; and visualise objects in their mind's eye. To be an effective communicator in today's world, a person needs to be able to interpret, create and select images to convey a range of meanings.

There are many forms of visual communication including gestures, objects, signs and symbols. Visual sign systems are everywhere. For example, dance, film, fashion, hairstyles, exhibitions, public monuments, interior design, lighting, computer games, advertising, photography, architecture and art are just some examples of visual communication. To be visually literate a person should be able to:

- analyse and interpret images to gain meaning within the cultural context the image was created and exists;
- analyse the syntax of images including style and composition;
- analyse the techniques used to produce the image;
- evaluate the aesthetic merit of the work;
- evaluate the merit of the work in terms of purpose and audience; and
- grasp the synergy, interaction, innovation, affective impact and/or 'feel' of an image

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# The Visual Literacy White Paper

**Joacim Rocklöv**



## **The Visual Literacy White Paper:**

## Decoding **The Visual Literacy White Paper**: Revealing the Captivating Potential of Verbal Expression

In a period characterized by interconnectedness and an insatiable thirst for knowledge, the captivating potential of verbal expression has emerged as a formidable force. Its ability to evoke sentiments, stimulate introspection, and incite profound transformations is genuinely awe-inspiring. Within the pages of "**The Visual Literacy White Paper**," a mesmerizing literary creation penned by a celebrated wordsmith, readers attempt an enlightening odyssey, unraveling the intricate significance of language and its enduring affect our lives. In this appraisal, we shall explore the book is central themes, evaluate its distinctive writing style, and gauge its pervasive influence on the hearts and minds of its readership.

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