

Fluency through Literacy

What is Fluency?

Fluency has 2 faces. Firstly we can say that a 7 year old child is phonetically fluent having acquired the source code and the algorithms of the language to develop literacy but they would be considered illiterate compared to a university graduate. There are various accepted distinctions within the fluent use of the language although in the main it comes down to the breadth of a speaker's vocabulary bank both active and passive.

The active vocabulary bank is that which the speaker has full confidence in using and does so in the course of their professional and personal life, while passive vocabulary is that which is not normally used by the speaker in these roles and/or his confident use of which is not so high although his understanding is enough to allow comprehension and enable engagement if they so wish.

The most commonly highlighted types of fluency are reading fluency, oral fluency, oral-reading fluency, and written or compositional fluency. I would add one more and that would be phonetic fluency i.e. the ability to distinguish between the syllables of the language to compose comprehension.

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These types of fluency are interrelated, but do not necessarily develop in tandem or linearly. They are interrelated in so far as is determined by the studies chosen and the experiences lived and it is quite common to find examples where someone is quite fluent in literature but knows none of the jargon of engineering and vice versa.

The most difficult fluency to develop for second language learners is phonetic fluency or listening comprehension. This fluency must be developed to allow the learner to comprehend automatically thus overcoming the learning phase of identification and translation which can be very tiring. Once this begins, and it is process which takes time, the learner will be ever more motivated to engage with the language.

What we can draw from this is that the ability to speak well on any topic will depend on the knowledge of vocabulary to properly explain oneself or understand any speaker, so the accumulation of vocabulary no matter how unimportant it may be at the time will form part of the mosaic of the language as colored by its words and are therefore all interrelated.



What is Literacy?

Literacy as it is understood in the English language is quite simply measured by the number of words known and recognized and the ability to apply this vocabulary in specific, general and abstract contexts.

So the question here is;

What do I know when I know a word in English?

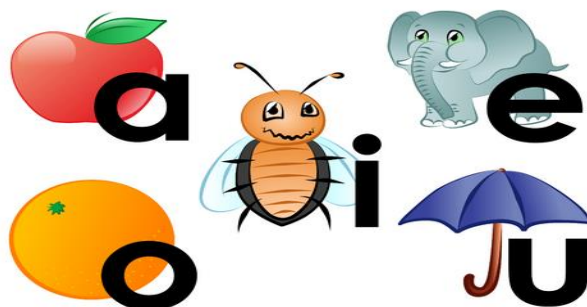


1. Sound and pronunciation
2. Spelling
3. Meaning (various)
4. Application (various)

Literacy is traditionally defined as the ability to read and write. In the case of the 7 year old child they will begin to read first and nearly simultaneously learn to write having had years of preparation learning to recite by heart and write the alphabet to the point where it is as well-known as their own names.

This happens in native speaking English cultures as the relationship between the phonology and orthography can be complicated especially for those whose mother tongue is a phonetic language, such as Spanish or Italian. In the case of non-phonetical languages such as English it is essential to resolve this relationship to pursue a higher level of studies beyond high school.

Literacy then is developed firstly is consolidating this pre-primary preparation by embarking on a 6 year course of continuous spelling exercises and testing which is ubiquitous to all subjects combined with an ongoing reading program and writing assessments through periodic compositions on various subjects related to the reading program or life in general to develop the abstract use of metaphor, irony, hyperbole and simile.



As the main focus in these primary years and also later is on literacy and numeracy in preparation for firstly high-school and then university learning, the literacy level of each student will play an important part in the final outcome of their studies and efforts. This is therefore a significant indicator which points to the importance of the accumulation for articulate expression and comprehension albeit oral or written.



How should we begin to acquire a higher level of literacy?

1. Learn to spell and follow the spellingbee competitions on social media.
2. When you learn a new word then vocalize the spelling and pronunciation.
3. Develop a reading habit specifically with literature. The reason for this is that good literature stimulates the imagination and this provides the perfect experiential opportunity for building language association through neural pathways.
4. Develop a habit of reading the daily news headlines to keep up to date with new terms and phrases.
5. Vocalize each day by reading aloud or vocalize your thoughts while driving or cooking. This reinforces day simple everyday language.

Remember that language takes a format of sound and cannot be learned in silence.



Finally it should be understood that literacy cannot be taught but needs to be acquired and this puts the responsibility squarely on the learners' shoulders while the teacher acts a guide and/or coach in the encouragement and motivation of each student to achieve the highest level of literacy which is the key to higher education and better communication.