

Developing literacy essay examples

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



My experience with literacy involves two different languages. I am an international student and did not learn English when I was young. Instead I learned the language most commonly spoken in my native country. When I was learning my mother tongue, I never thought much about literacy. It just seemed to be something that happened naturally, that as long as I learned to read and write I would be literate. However, when I began to learn English, I discovered that literacy involves more than just reading and writing a limited amount of words. Literacy in English means that I can understand what someone else has written, even if it is complicated, and I can express myself in writing well enough that others understand my meaning.

My first exposure to English came through music. I listened to music that had lyrics in English. I am embarrassed to admit that sometimes I just memorized the lyrics without really knowing what the words meant. My friends and I could sing along with several songs, even when we knew the meaning of only a few words. Sometimes we argued about what some of those lyrics meant; they could be confusing even when we used a dictionary to look up every word in the lyrics. At that time, though, it was more important to me to be able to sing the lyrics than actually understand what they meant. We were more concerned about appearing cool to others by knowing songs in English than we were with meaning.

I did eventually take some English classes in school and slowly began learning vocabulary and English grammar. At first English was very difficult for me; it did not seem to make any sense. Like anybody else taking a foreign language, it pleased me when I could finally say a few phrases in English and respond correctly to the instructor. As time went on, I learned to

read short passages in English and write a few sentences in English as well. These were mostly very short, very simple sentences using vocabulary words from our textbook. I began reading longer passages and writing a few paragraphs at a time in English. I began to think of myself as literate in English, but I was wrong.

When I came to the United States, I took ESL (English as a second language) classes. In that class, the first time I tried to read a novel in English, I realized that I was not really literate yet. I had to use my dictionary almost constantly and then re-read each page to grasp the meaning. Many of the expressions were ones that I had not learned in class; I know now they were slang expressions but at the time I could not figure out what they meant. Sometimes I could put the words into Google and find an explanation that made sense. Other times, the explanation just confused me more. However, I could ask students who grew up speaking English what those phrases meant and they could instantly tell me the meaning. The more I talked to English speakers, the more my vocabulary improved not just in regular words, but in the expressions that people use in everyday conversations. This helped me in reading; the further into the novel I got, the easier it became for me to guess at words and get their definition right without using a dictionary. I could read a sentence in English and not have to think consciously about what each individual word meant; I could simply understand the entire sentence as a whole.

It was similar for me with writing. The first time I had to write an entire paper in English, I felt very frustrated. I knew exactly what I wanted to say, but I did not always know the correct way to say it in English. The grammar also

intimidated me a little, and so many of my sentences sounded as if they were written by a young child. However, as I learned to read better, I would sometimes copy a sentence from a novel or textbook, and then substitute my words into the sentence so my sentence would sound more sophisticated. Doing this helped me write better in English because I was no longer just writing short, simple sentences. Like with reading, the more I practiced writing, the easier it became for me. I no longer had to write my assignments in my mother tongue and then translate them into English; I could actually think and write in English.

I think achieving literacy means that you have to be able to do both reading and writing. Reading was definitely easier for me, but when you only read you are being very passive with the language. When I write in English, I know that I am more or less literate in English because I can make myself understood. I still struggle with the language at times, and there are still many words I do not understand immediately. However, the more I read and write in English, the better my literacy will be. I will know I am completely literate in English when I can read ideas that are completely new to me and understand them easily, and when I can take my most complicated thoughts and put them into English so others can comprehend them as well.