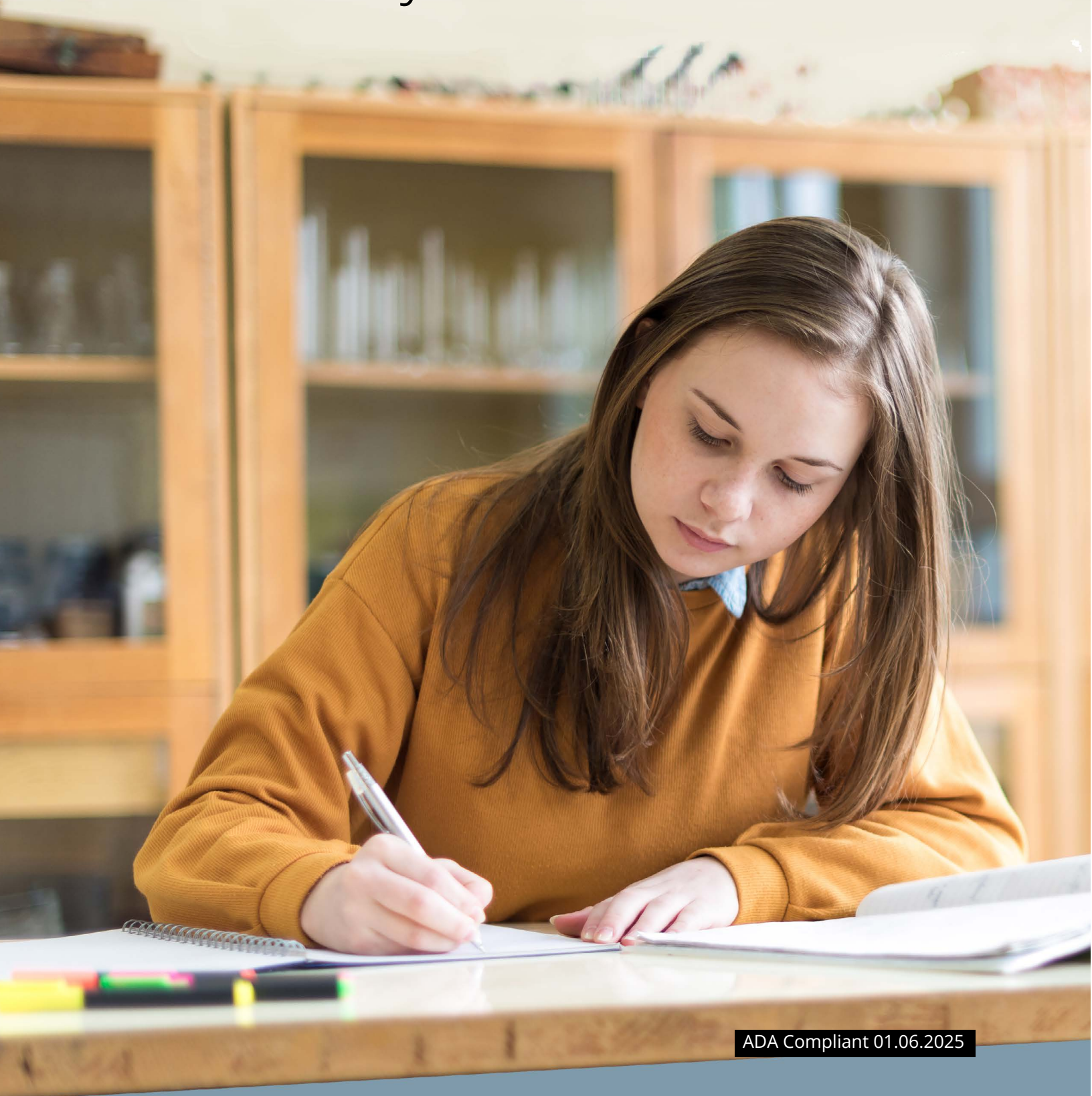


# **DISCIPLINARY** Literacy in Utah Schools



This is a necessary blank page.

# Disciplinary Literacy in Utah Schools



Utah State Board of Education  
250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200

Sydnee Dickson, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Todd Call, MBA  
Teaching and Learning  
Interim Director

NOVEMBER 2024

## Contributors

For further information or questions, please contact:

**Robert Austin**

Secondary Social Studies Specialist  
robert.austin@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7575

**Michelle Berg**

Elementary Science & STEM Specialist  
michelle.berg@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7906

**Liz Bunker**

K-12 Arts Education Specialist  
liz.bunker@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7670

**Teri Davis**

Physical Education Specialist  
teri.davis@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7655

**Milo Maughan**

Secondary Science Education Specialist  
milo.maughan@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7808

**Jodi Parker**

Health Education Specialist  
jodi.parker@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7734

**JoAnna Sorensen**

Elementary Social Studies Specialist  
joanna.sorensen@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7534

**Mike Spencer**

Secondary Mathematics Specialist  
mike.spencer@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7791

**Naomi Watkins, Ph.D.**

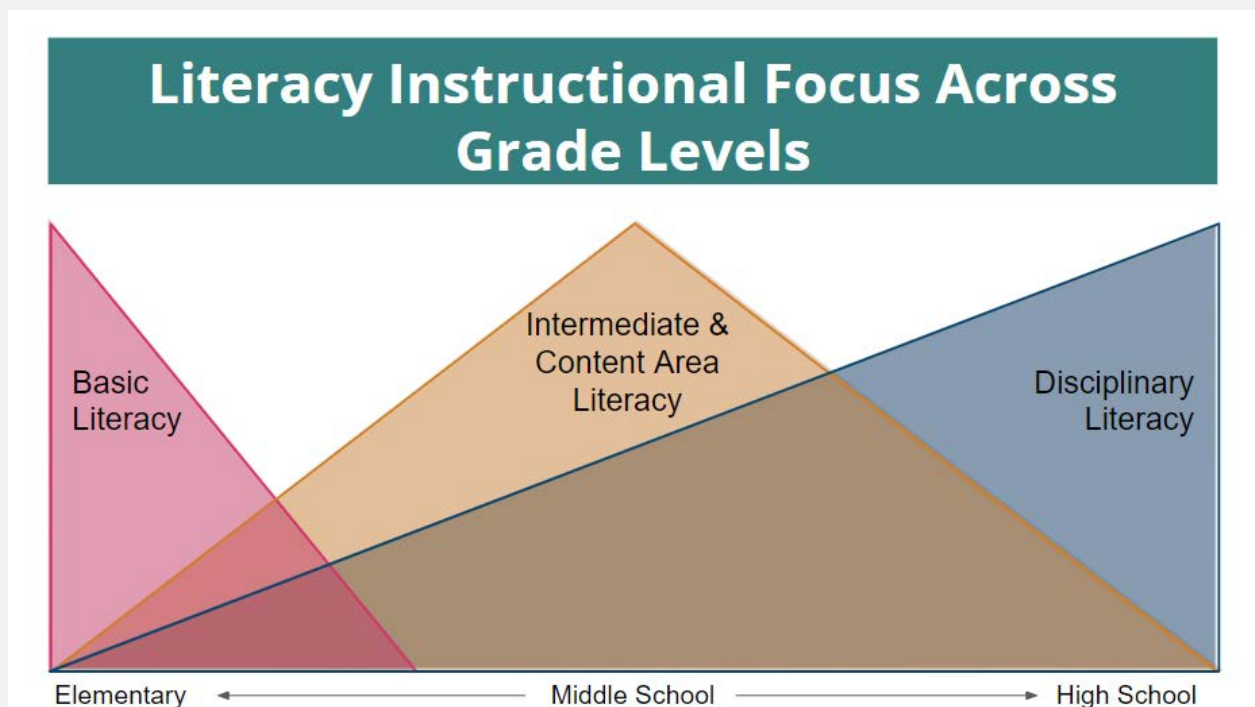
Secondary English Language Arts Specialist  
naomi.watkins@schools.utah.gov  
(801) 538-7616

# Disciplinary Literacy in Utah Schools

As students progress through their educational journeys, their literacy needs evolve beyond foundational reading and writing skills. Foundational literacy skills equip individuals with the fundamental knowledge and practices needed to become successful readers and writers. This includes phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. With each grade level, students encounter increasingly complex texts and information within specific content areas, requiring a deeper understanding of how language and knowledge are constructed within each discipline. Disciplinary literacy provides a framework for addressing these evolving needs by equipping students with the specialized literacy skills necessary to navigate the unique demands of each content area. (See figure #1.)

Figure #1

## Literacy Instructional Focus Across Grade Levels



“Disciplinary literacy means, not just accumulating knowledge about the discipline but understanding the discipline’s important theoretical ideas. It means understanding what questions are important to the discipline and how to seek answers to those questions. It also means being able to read and write successfully within that discipline.”

Holly Johnson\*

## What is disciplinary literacy?

Disciplinary literacy is the ability to appropriately and effectively communicate in a discipline or content area through using the knowledge, norms, and practices of that discipline. Specifically, disciplinary literacy entails the following components:

- (a) the authentic ways communication occurs (for example, texts, patterns of discourse) within the discipline,
- (b) the conceptual content knowledge of the discipline,
- (c) the nature or norms of the discipline (for example, dispositions, values), and
- (d) the practices utilized within the discipline (for example, skills, strategies, processes).

## Why does disciplinary literacy matter?

Disciplinary literacy is important to student literacy development for several reasons:

1. **Deeper Understanding of Content:** It helps students move beyond surface-level comprehension and engage with the specific ways that different disciplines generate, communicate, and apply knowledge. This leads to a richer understanding of the content matter.
2. **Critical Thinking Skills:** Disciplinary literacy encourages students to think critically about the texts and information they encounter. They learn to evaluate sources, identify biases, and analyze and develop arguments within the context of a particular field.
3. **Learner Agency:** By understanding the specialized language and practices of a content area, students gain a sense of empowerment and agency. They become active participants in the learning process, capable of contributing to the ongoing conversations within that discipline.
4. **Real-World Application:** Disciplinary literacy emphasizes the authentic ways that knowledge is used in the real world. Students learn to apply their skills to solve problems, make informed decisions, and engage with complex issues in a meaningful way.

---

\*Johnson, H. (2011). What It Is They Do: Differentiating Knowledge and Literacy Practices Across Content Disciplines. *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(2), 100-109.



## How does disciplinary literacy differ from content area literacy?

Content area literacy and disciplinary literacy are approaches to literacy instruction within the content areas, but they have distinct focuses. **Content area literacy focuses on teaching general reading and writing strategies that can be applied across different subjects.** (See figure #2.)

Figure #2

### Examples of Content Area Literacy Strategies

*(The same generic strategies and activities are used across content areas.)*

Before Reading	During Reading	After Reading
<b>Activating Prior Knowledge:</b> Using KWL charts, brainstorming, quick writes, and concept maps <b>Predicting:</b> Making predictions based on text features (titles, headings, images) <b>Setting a Purpose:</b> Establishing learning goals and developing guiding questions <b>Vocabulary Preview:</b> Using word walls, Frayer models, and context clues	<b>Questioning:</b> Generating questions and utilizing QAR (Question-Answer Relationship) framework <b>Visualizing:</b> Creating mental pictures of the scenes, characters, or events described in the text <b>Monitoring Comprehension:</b> Recognizing areas of difficulty and seeking clarification through rereading or other strategies	<b>Summarizing:</b> Identifying main idea and supporting details, using graphic organizers, and engaging in RAFT writing <b>Reflecting:</b> Writing reflections, summaries, or responses to prompts to solidify learning and express understanding <b>Extending:</b> Conducting further research on the topic and applying ideas to other texts and real life situations

**Disciplinary literacy emphasizes the unique ways of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking within specific disciplines.** Both content area literacy and disciplinary literacy need to be used in conjunction with each other to support students' comprehensive literacy development and success. (See figure #3)

Figure #3

**Key Differences Between Content Area Literacy and Disciplinary Literacy**

Content Area Literacy	Disciplinary Literacy
Emphasizes similar or general reading and writing strategies that can be applied across different disciplines.	Emphasizes the specialized ways of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking that are specific to each discipline.
Helps students comprehend texts from all content areas by providing them with a toolkit of transferable literacy skills and strategies.	Helps students comprehend texts in each content area by teaching them the literacy skills and strategies used by experts in that discipline.
Focuses on student mastery and understanding of content.	Focuses on how discipline-specific processes develop student mastery and understanding of content.





## What does disciplinary literacy look like in the various content areas?

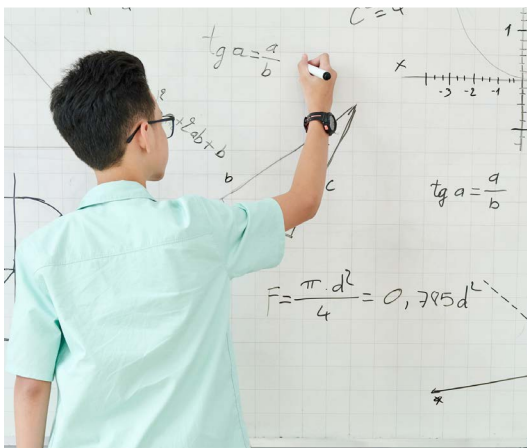
Figure #4 gives a list of examples illustrating what disciplinary literacy looks like in different content areas. It is not an exhaustive list. It serves to illustrate how each content area has distinct texts and ways of reading, listening, writing, speaking, and thinking.

Figure #4

### Examples of Disciplinary Literacy in the Content Areas

Content Areas	Primary Text Types	Read/Listen	Write/Speak	Think
<b>English Language Arts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Novels</li> <li>Poetry</li> <li>Dramas</li> <li>Films</li> <li>Short stories</li> <li>Literary analyses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider author's background and purpose.</li> <li>Analyze author's word choice and syntax for its effect on audience and meaning.</li> <li>Find underlying messages and themes.</li> <li>Examine character and plot development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use mentor texts as models of good craft.</li> <li>Develop arguments, narratives, and informational pieces following these text structures.</li> <li>Craft original claims using evidence from text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflect on and synthesize across multiple texts.</li> <li>Ask questions of the author.</li> <li>Consider research or others' analyses.</li> <li>Identify themes and patterns.</li> <li>Contemplate multiple points of view.</li> <li>Assume a critical stance on a text.</li> </ul>
<b>Performing Arts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Musical scores</li> <li>Musical recordings</li> <li>Choreography directions</li> <li>Visual cues of conductors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider an artist's background and purpose.</li> <li>Contextualize performance within historical context.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perform a musical piece.</li> <li>Critique performances.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create original musical scores.</li> <li>Refine, remix, and re-envision existing works.</li> </ul>

Content Areas	Primary Text Types	Read/Listen	Write/Speak	Think
<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pamphlets</li> <li>■ Research studies</li> <li>■ Public Service Announcements</li> <li>■ Data, graphs, and charts</li> <li>■ Stories and case studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Verify validity and accuracy of information.</li> <li>■ Analyze and interpret data.</li> <li>■ Synthesize data and information from multiple sources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Summarize key details.</li> <li>■ Develop arguments based on evidence.</li> <li>■ Persuade others to develop healthy habits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Consider sequence, cause and effect.</li> <li>■ Identify patterns and trends.</li> <li>■ Decide and customize information for personalized needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Math</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Proofs</li> <li>■ Algorithms</li> <li>■ Algebraic and symbolic texts</li> <li>■ Notations</li> <li>■ Diagrams, figures, graphs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Search for the “truth” and for errors.</li> <li>■ Interpret information presented in symbols and words.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop mathematical models.</li> <li>■ Construct viable argument through proof and reasoning.</li> <li>■ Critique the reasoning of others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Focus on problem solving.</li> <li>■ Process and apply reasoning from others.</li> </ul>

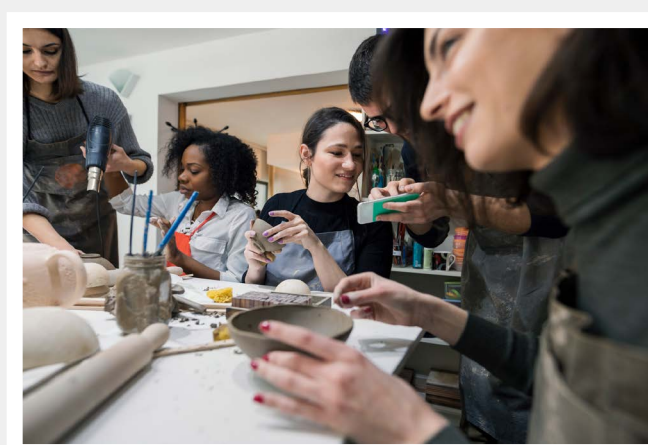


Content Areas	Primary Text Types	Read/Listen	Write/Speak	Think
<b>Physical Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Playbooks and videos</li> <li>■ Research Articles</li> <li>■ Movement Cues</li> <li>■ Human body</li> <li>■ Sport Environments</li> <li>■ Diagrams</li> <li>■ Competitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Examine sequences of movements or order of plays on athletic performance.</li> <li>■ Analyze and interpret data.</li> <li>■ View an athletic match or performance.</li> <li>■ Predict outcome of a game based on data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Perform an athletic skill.</li> <li>■ Critique an athletic performance.</li> <li>■ Explain the sequence of a play.</li> <li>■ Collaborate with teammates.</li> <li>■ Develop training plans.</li> <li>■ Assess the effects of physical education on health.</li> <li>■ Engage family and friends in a learned sport or activity outside of school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Follow a clear sequence.</li> <li>■ Determine cause and effect.</li> <li>■ Identify patterns and trends.</li> <li>■ Strategize for future performance.</li> </ul>
<b>Science</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Scientific journal articles</li> <li>■ Field notes</li> <li>■ Figures, graphs, charts</li> <li>■ Observed phenomena</li> <li>■ Models and diagrams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Obtain and evaluate facts based on evidence.</li> <li>■ Analyze and interpret data.</li> <li>■ Consider validity of claims and evidence.</li> <li>■ Investigate hypothesis and claims.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop and use models.</li> <li>■ Plan and carry out investigations.</li> <li>■ Construct explanations.</li> <li>■ Engage in argument from evidence.</li> <li>■ Ask questions about the natural and material world.</li> <li>■ Engage in authentic discourse to synthesize information and communicate understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop a hypothesis.</li> <li>■ Use mathematics and computational thinking.</li> <li>■ Identify patterns, cause and effect.</li> <li>■ Consider information and data within systems.</li> <li>■ Decide which methods to employ based on questions under investigation.</li> </ul>

Content Areas	Primary Text Types	Read/Listen	Write/Speak	Think
<b>Social Studies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Maps</li> <li>■ Oral histories</li> <li>■ Photographs</li> <li>■ Diaries and journals</li> <li>■ Newspapers</li> <li>■ Artifacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Contrast primary and secondary sources.</li> <li>■ Consider an author's perspective and bias. (sourcing)</li> <li>■ Make connections to other events, past and present.</li> <li>■ Contextualize evidence within time periods.</li> <li>■ Corroborate multiple perspectives and documents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Craft arguments regarding significant events and concepts.</li> <li>■ Engage in dialogues considering multiple perspectives and/or arguing a claim.</li> <li>■ Present findings on a specific historical question.</li> <li>■ Create a coherent narrative of the past.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Follow chronological reasoning.</li> <li>■ Identify logical fallacies.</li> <li>■ Notice patterns and themes.</li> <li>■ Identify causal relationships.</li> <li>■ Identify bias and perspective.</li> </ul>



Content Areas	Primary Text Types	Read/Listen	Write/Speak	Think
<b>Visual Arts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Original art pieces (paintings, sculptures,</li> <li>■ Artistic statements, proposals, and critiques</li> <li>■ Technical instructions</li> <li>■ Scripts and screenplays</li> <li>■ Marketing materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Consider an artist's background and purpose.</li> <li>■ Generate ideas from other art pieces and artists.</li> <li>■ Contextualize an art piece within an historical context.</li> <li>■ Gather and synthesize visual information.</li> <li>■ Analyze use of mediums.</li> <li>■ Assess artwork based on application of artistic elements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop an artist statement.</li> <li>■ Critique art pieces.</li> <li>■ Create artwork.</li> <li>■ Explain the artistic process.</li> <li>■ Compare different artworks, identifying similarities and differences in style, technique, and subject matter.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Make connections.</li> <li>■ Notice patterns and themes.</li> <li>■ Follow a sequence.</li> <li>■ Consider perspective of the artist vs. the viewer.</li> </ul>



**Disciplinary literacy** is not merely an addition to the educational landscape; it is a crucial shift in how we prepare students for success in the 21st century. By recognizing the unique literacy demands of each discipline and equipping students with the tools to navigate them, we empower them to become active learners, critical thinkers, and effective communicators. Embracing disciplinary literacy practices across Utah schools will foster a generation of students who are not just literate, but truly knowledgeable and engaged in the world around them.





# Disciplinary Literacy Resources

- Burke, P., & Kennedy, E. (2024). ["Why do you think that?" Exploring disciplinary literacy in elementary science, history and visual arts,](#) *The Reading Teacher*, 77(5), 642–652.
- CEEDAR Center. [Course Enhancement Module Disciplinary on Literacy,](#) University of Florida.
- Cervetti, G., & Pearson, P. D. (2012). ["Reading, writing, & thinking like a scientist,"](#) *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(7), 580–586.
- Daggett, S. (2006). [Physical education and literacy — The odd couple or a match made in heaven?](#) *NYSUT Educator's Voice*, 3(3), 42–49.
- Gabriel, R. (2023, December 1). ["Disciplinary literacy means doing the discipline,"](#) *ASCD Blog*, 81(4).
- Hamilton, E. R. & Stolle, E. P. (2016). ["The importance of disciplinary literacy,"](#) *Colleagues*, 13(1), article 9.
- International Literacy Association. (2017). ["Content area and disciplinary literacy: Strategies and frameworks."](#) Newark, DE.
- Lindberg, M. (2024). ["Disciplinary literacy and verbal language in physical education,"](#) *Sport, Education and Society*, 1–15.
- Moje, E. B. (2010, April 6). ["Disciplinary literacy: Why it matters and what we should do about it,"](#) Keynote, National Writing Project.
- Rainey, E. C. (2016). [Disciplinary literacy in English Language Arts: Exploring the social and problem-based nature of literary reading & reasoning.](#) *Reading Research Quarterly*, 52(1), 53–71.
- Shanahan, T. (2017, March 17). ["Disciplinary literacy: The basics,"](#) *Shanahan on Literacy* blog.
- Thompson, C. M., Anttila, E., Ruthmann, S. A., & Doan, W. J. (2013). ["The arts & literacy: What does it mean to be arts literate?"](#) *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 14(18), 1–21.
- VanSledright, B. A. (2004). ["What does it mean to think historically . . . and how do you teach it?"](#) *Social Education*, 68(3), 230–233.



250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200

Sydnee Dickson, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction