

Digital Literacy Framework

2026

New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

What is Digital Literacy?

Digital literacy is the ability to think critically, act ethically, and take part in a world shaped by digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI).

It is not about keeping up with the latest apps or platforms. It is about developing **judgment** – knowing when and how to use technology, when to question it, and when to put it down.

This framework builds on New Brunswick's 2022 Digital Literacy Framework. The six components remain the same. This version weaves AI thinking throughout, rather than treating it as a separate topic. It does not add new expectations. It supports and clarifies work already happening in classrooms.

Technology expands thinking – it does not replace it. Learning is human-centred. AI and digital tools should expand what students can think and create, not do their thinking for them.

Digital literacy prepares students to use powerful tools responsibly – the goal is confident, informed, and ethical use, not avoidance.

What Digitally Literate Students Do

Digitally literate students develop habits of thinking and learning over time. They:

- Use digital and AI tools to **extend their thinking**, not replace it
- **Question and check** information, including AI-generated content
- Make **deliberate choices** about when to use – and when not to use – technology
- **Create and share** ideas clearly and well
- Act with **care and honesty** in digital spaces
- Reflect on how technology shapes their thinking and learning

These habits grow across grades and subjects. They are not tied to any specific tool – they are about how students think and learn.

The Six Components

The framework organises this learning into six connected areas. No single area is more important than the others – they work together.

Digital Citizenship

Students learn to take part in digital spaces with care for others and awareness of their own rights and responsibilities. This means understanding privacy, data, and ethical behaviour online. It also means asking whose voices are present in digital spaces, whose are missing, and what it means to use tools that affect other people – including understanding how AI can shape what we see and who gets heard.

Digital Health and Wellness

Students develop the self-awareness and habits to use technology in ways that support their well-being rather than undermine it. This includes managing attention, recognising when a tool is doing the thinking for them, and making conscious choices about how and when to engage. Healthy technology habits are not about avoidance – they are about agency.

Critical Inquiry and Meaning Making

Students evaluate information, question sources, and build understanding rather than accepting digital outputs at face value. This means locating information across diverse sources, assessing reliability and bias, and connecting evidence to prior knowledge to draw informed conclusions. With AI-generated content now common in research, writing, and media, these habits matter more than ever – and making meaning from information remains an essential human responsibility.

Creativity, Design, and Problem Solving

Students use digital tools – including AI – to explore, develop, and refine their own ideas. This includes designing solutions, expressing creativity, and approaching problems in inventive ways. The key is authorship: students are the designers, not the tools. AI can support brainstorming and drafting, but the questions, judgments, and choices – and responsibility for the final work – belong to the student.

Communication and Collaboration

Students co-create knowledge across digital environments. As AI tools shape how we communicate and collaborate – through suggested replies, shared workspaces, summaries, and platforms – students need to consider how these systems influence teamwork and perspective. Effective digital communicators and collaborators understand the tools they use and the relationships they shape.

Computational Thinking

Students break down problems, identify patterns, and develop logical approaches to decisions and solutions. Computational thinking is not just for coding; it supports analysing complex situations and working through problems in structured ways, with or without technology. Connecting this thinking to real-world contexts makes it relevant across all areas of learning.

How Learning Deepens: Use, Understand, Create

Students deepen their relationship with digital technologies over time through three connected modes.

Most often, learning starts with **use** – picking up a tool, trying it out, exploring what it does. Through that experience, students begin to **understand** how the tool works, what shapes its outputs, and what its limits are. With that understanding, they can **create** – producing original work, making deliberate choices, and using technology with real purpose.

These three modes are not a ladder. They overlap and cycle back on each other. A student creating something often deepens their understanding. A deeper understanding leads to more thoughtful use. In an AI context this matters especially: students who use AI without understanding how it works are less able to question its outputs or judge when to use it at all.

Use	Understand	Create
Apply tools to support learning, communication, and problem-solving.	Know how technologies work, how they shape information, and what their limits are.	Produce original ideas and work, making deliberate choices about how technology plays a role.

Why AI Matters

Digital literacy is not just a school skill. The students in our classrooms today will enter a world where AI is changing how information is made and shared, how decisions get made, and how work gets done. Students who leave school without strong digital literacy face real disadvantages – in post-secondary learning, in work, and in public life. Digital and AI competencies increasingly shape access to meaningful employment, and New Brunswick students deserve the preparation to compete, contribute, and lead in that environment.

What is Generative AI?

Generative AI is a type of artificial intelligence that produces new content – text, images, audio, code, or video – in response to a prompt. These systems are trained on large amounts of existing human-created content and generate outputs by recognising statistical patterns, not by understanding meaning. Outputs can appear fluent and authoritative even when they are incomplete, biased, or incorrect.

AI is a powerful and rapidly changing technology – and an unfinished one. AI systems are built on data that may not represent all people equally. They can reflect and reinforce existing biases, leave out important perspectives, and produce confident-sounding outputs that are wrong or misleading. Many systems are not clear about how they work or how they reach their conclusions. Questions about fairness, accountability, and whose voices get heard – and whose get left out – are live and important. Students need the knowledge and judgment to engage with AI critically, not just fluently.

Digital technologies also have environmental costs that are easy to overlook. Training and running AI models requires significant energy. The devices we use depend on resource extraction, and discarded electronics create growing waste problems. Understanding these impacts – alongside the social and ethical ones – is part of what it means to be digitally literate.

Engaging with AI: With, Through, About, Without

Frameworks for AI literacy around the world converge on a similar idea: students need to use AI purposefully, understand how it works, and think critically about its effects. This framework organises that engagement around four modes that reflect how AI actually shows up in learning – not just as a tool students pick up, but as an environment that shapes their experience, a subject worth examining, and something they sometimes need to set aside entirely.

With AI – Students use AI as a thinking partner: generating ideas, getting feedback, exploring options. The student directs the work and makes the final calls.

Through AI – Students learn in environments where AI shapes the experience – adaptive platforms, recommendation systems, interactive tools. Understanding how these shape learning is part of the work.

About AI – Students examine how AI systems are built, what data they draw on, where they can mislead, and what their broader effects are – on society, on fairness, and on the environment.

Without AI – Students build independent skills and original thinking. Some learning goals are best reached without automated support. This is not a rejection of AI – it is a recognition that strong independent thinking makes better AI use possible.

The four modes - with, through, about, and without AI - are intended as a flexible framework. Teachers may apply one or several perspectives in combination, using their professional judgment to align AI use with learning goals, context, and student readiness. Not every mode will receive equal emphasis.

Assessment

Digital literacy shows up in how students think and decide – not just in what they produce.

Evidence of learning can be gathered through three sources used together:

Observations	Conversations	Products
watching how students work with and around technology	asking students to explain their thinking and choices	examining the work students create

Using all three gives the fullest picture of what a student understands. It can also be useful to look at learning both with and without AI, to see where students reason independently and where they rely on tools.

Academic integrity in an AI context is best addressed proactively, through task design, rather than reactively, through monitoring during or after the fact. If a task can be completed by AI with no meaningful student contribution, it needs to be redesigned. Oral explanation, real-time problem solving, process documentation, and iterative drafts all make student thinking visible in ways that are hard to fabricate. Students who understand AI well are better placed to use it honestly than students who have simply been told not to use it.

When digital and AI tools are part of an assessment task, expectations for appropriate and transparent use should be communicated explicitly to students. They should understand what

role AI may play in the task, what they are expected to contribute independently, and how their use of AI tools will be visible in the final product or process. Clear expectations reduce confusion and support students in making ethical choices about tool use.

Digital literacy is assessed within regular subject-area learning. It does not require separate reporting.

What This Means in Practice

Digital literacy is not a separate subject. It is a lens through which all areas of learning can be viewed.

- Embed digital and AI thinking within existing subjects and outcomes
- Design tasks where students make choices, use judgment, and reflect on how technology can assist
- Know when technology strengthens learning – and when a conversation, a hands-on task, or independent work serves students better

This framework provides a shared language for that work. It guides thinking but does not prescribe tools or methods. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) apply throughout – digital and AI tools, used well, can support multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression for all learners.

Three principles run through all of this: technology expands thinking – it does not replace it; judgment is the goal, not tool fluency; and strong independent thinking makes better AI use possible.

Where to Go Next

The best place to start is the curriculum website and PL Hub, where you will find examples, resources, and professional learning supports organised around these components. This document is part of a broader set of supports for teaching and learning.

- **Digital Literacy Framework At a Glance** – A one-page summary of the framework
- **Digital Literacy Framework Companion Document** – Detailed descriptions, grade-band indicators, and planning tools for curriculum teams and school leaders
- [Curriculum Website](#) – Examples, resources, and implementation supports
- **Professional Learning Hub ([PL Hub](#))** – Professional learning opportunities and tools

For More Information

This framework connects to key provincial documents:

- [Leveraging Technology Plan](#) – Direction for technology use in teaching and learning
- [Recommended Approaches to Generative AI](#) – Practical guidance on AI use in schools
- [Policy 311: ICT Use](#) – Expectations for safe, ethical, and responsible use of technology

Additional resources and examples are available through the curriculum website and PL Hub.