

AI literacy is a disciplinary act.

Each field has a responsibility to define what AI literacy means inside its own intellectual tradition.

AI literacy is a **disciplinary capacity** to understand, use, question, and govern AI in relation to **human judgment**.

Not these.

Not ~~“how to use ChatGPT.”~~ Those interfaces age out.

Not ~~“how to spot a cheater.”~~ Detection is unreliable evidence.

Four ways learners interact with AI.

These domains describe different forms of interaction, not levels in a progression.

1

Engaging with AI

Recognize AI's presence and evaluate the accuracy, relevance, and limitations of its outputs.

2

Creating with AI

Collaborate with AI while refining outputs and addressing ownership, attribution, and fairness.

3

Managing AI

Decide whether, when, and how AI should support human work, goals, and judgment.

4

Designing AI

Examine how data and design choices shape an AI system's behavior and social impact.

A learner may engage, create, manage, or design while drawing on knowledge, skills, ethics, and human judgment.

Four commitments we carry across every domain.

I Knowledge

What is it, how does it work, what data?

II Durable skills

What can students do with it that is worth doing?

III Ethical judgment

When, with whom, under what conditions, by whose permission?

IV Social good

Who benefits, who is harmed, who is governing?

Use social good as a required design check: Who benefits, who may be harmed, and who has decision-making power?

Three working tiers faculty can recognize.

Tier 1

Technical

AI literacy

Question: How does it work?
What is in the training data?

Context: The baseline
mechanical reality.

Tier 2

Applied

AI literacy

Question: How do I use it
for a real task with awareness
of its limits?

Context: What most professional
users need day-to-day.

Tier 3

Critical

AI literacy

Question: Where should it
not be used? Who is harmed?

Context: The exact space
liberal arts already inhabits.

Most faculty already teach the second or third tier through their concern for evidence and ethics, without ever naming AI literacy as a goal.

Where AI sharpens. Where it puts pressure.

DISCIPLINE

WHERE AI MAY SHARPEN +

WHERE AI PUTS PRESSURE -

Humanities

Translation; accessibility of dense texts; sketching multiple readings

Voice; evidence; dialogue; judgment about texts

Sciences

Code scaffolding; data cleaning; literature scanning

Replicability; method; falsifiability; peer review

Professional fields

(nursing, business, education, law)

Standardized communication; checklist drafting; case prep

Ethics of practice; calibration of confidence; responsibility to client, patient, or community

Illustrative examples—replace with your field. Every right-column entry is a specific cognitive practice. None is "critical thinking" without further specification.

Fluent. Confident. Wrong in a way only the field can see.

PROMPT · “Summarize the causes of the French Revolution.”

“The Revolution was caused by widespread hunger, an out-of-touch monarchy, and Enlightenment ideas about liberty — a clear case of an oppressed people rising against tyranny.”

The disciplinary failure:

A historian sees it instantly, the answer flattens contested historiography into a single moral narrative, cites no sources, and smuggles in a conclusion (“tyranny”) the evidence is supposed to test. It is not wrong about facts. It is wrong about how the field reasons.

This is the right-hand column of the map in practice: the pressure is not on facts — it is on method, voice, and judgment.

Do not stop at ‘critical thinking’



Replace with a specific cognitive practice.

HUMANITIES

“discriminating between two historical sources whose framing differs”

QUANTITATIVE

“calibrating confidence in an experimental result when n is small”

PROFESSIONAL

“deciding which client recommendation to give when guidelines conflict”

Hold one absent student in mind.



EQUITY FLOOR

- The student who works thirty hours a week
- The student who is learning their second language
- The student with a disability you haven't been told about
- The student who cannot afford a paid AI subscription
- The student who already mistrusts the institution

When writing your Discipline Statement, name a value that protects at least one of these students.

Principles are easy in a list. They fight in a real course.

Rank your four commitments for ONE course you teach. Then sit with the conflict below — your Discipline Statement has to resolve it.

I • Knowledge

II • Durable skills

III • Ethical judgment

IV • Social good

THE TRADE-OFF

You allow AI assistance because it lifts the student working thirty hours a week (social good). But the same allowance erodes the unaided skill your field certifies (durable skills). Both commitments are real. Which gives way, for which assignments, and who decides?

Which would you rank first? An honest Discipline Statement names the loser, not just the winner.

One framework, three lenses on the same act.

WHAT THE LEARNER DOES

Engage • Create • Manage • Design

The four interactions — forms of contact with AI, not a ladder.

HOW DEEP THE LITERACY GOES

Technical → Applied → Critical

The three tiers — the question being asked gets harder.

WHAT WE CHECK IT AGAINST

Knowledge • Skills • Ethics • Social good

The four commitments — carried into every interaction.

A single act, a student using AI to check a source, is one interaction, at one tier, answerable to all four commitments.

Your Next Move

1. Open the Discipline Values and AI Literacy Snapshot worksheet.
2. Name one course you expect to revise.
3. List three student capabilities — one knowledge, one process, one judgment — and mark each as technical, applied, or critical AI literacy.

Closing Thought: AI literacy isn't about software. It is about protecting human judgment and ensuring equitable access in a drifting technological landscape.