

# LITERACY LEARNING IN THE SECONDARY YEARS

## Fact sheet for parents and carers



### OVERVIEW – LITERACY FROM YEARS 7-10

In Years 7-10, every subject has its own specialised terminology. Students need strong literacy skills both to learn the content of every subject, and to be able to demonstrate their learning in assessment tasks.

In this fact sheet, we summarise guidance from the UK-based *Education Endowment Foundation* and the Australian *Evidence for Learning (E4L) Group*<sup>3</sup>. This guidance aligns well with the Australian Curriculum<sup>1</sup>. We also provide some practical ways that parents and carers can help their children in Years 7-10 to further develop their literacy.

#### Key overall points:



Literacy has different elements. They are separated in the guidance<sup>2,3</sup> and in the text below, but they are linked in practice.



In Year 7-10:

1. Literacy is important across all subjects, not only in English
2. When students have the literacy skills needed in each subject (from Art to History to Science), then that will help them to learn successfully in those subjects.

### LISTENING AND SPEAKING

- Speaking and listening skills remain important in secondary school for improving students' reading and writing and for developing their communication in different subjects.
- It is useful for students to ask themselves questions about how they are learning. For example: 'what equipment will I need for this task?', or 'how do I know I have solved this problem?'. This is called metacognitive talk.
- Useful strategies while reading are for students: to think in advance about what they already know about the topic; to predict what might happen; to ask questions about the text; to clarifying words, sentences or diagrams that are confusing; and to summarise the meaning of a section of text.

#### How you can help:



Keep reading aloud to your child or listening to audiobooks together. It is not only young children who enjoy this and it helps develop young people's listening skills.

Make reading aloud something that is normal in your home, for example reading aloud a paragraph in a newspaper article, or a text message.

Have conversations, asking open-ended questions about topics they are interested in. For example, ask their opinions about current affairs, or about the sports pages in the newspaper.

## READING

- Texts in Years 7-10 are more complex, partly because every subject has its own, specialised vocabulary.
- Some words have a different meaning in school subjects from everyday language, and even different meanings between different subjects. For example, 'factor' has different meanings in Mathematics and in History.

### How you can help:



Have lots of different reading materials around: novels, non-fiction books, magazines, and newspapers. See what they pick up as a clue to what they are interested in.

Find out what your child likes to read so you can point them in the direction of more like this.

Show interest in their interests without passing judgement.

Support your child to build their vocabulary by looking up words they don't know in a dictionary.

Encourage your child to have their own response, whether that is to love or loathe a character in a book. Show that it's ok to re-read a favourite book.

Read some books written for teenagers yourself.

## WRITING

- Writing is a very demanding cognitive activity and puts a heavy load on students' working memory because it involves combining three processes:
  - physically handwriting and/or typing/keyboarding (*transcription*)
  - coming up with ideas and putting sentences and paragraphs together (*composition*)
  - planning, drafting, editing and revising (*executive functions*).
- Writing and reading are interconnected aspects of literacy. Improvement in one area generally leads to improvement in the other. Both writing and reading skills are important for learning subject content.

### How you can help:



Try to make sure your child has a good environment for writing: a comfortable place to sit, and a good pen or computer.

Give your child time. Often young people have very full schedules. But writing can take time: to develop ideas, to plan what and how to write, and then to try out writing a first draft.

Help your child to show off their writing, for example by posting it to a relative, putting it on a blog, or reading it aloud to you. Give feedback if they ask for that.

Encourage them to try 'freewriting': writing continuously for a set period of time (for example 10 minutes) without worrying about making mistakes. This can encourage creativity.

Use social media and technology to explain about different genres of writing.

## ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

- Although most young people have basic skills for reading and writing by Year 7, the literacy demands are very high in high school. Students have to read complex texts, understand specific terminology in different subjects, and produce written and spoken assessment tasks.
- As parents or carers you spend a lot of time with your children and know them well. If you are concerned that your child seems to be struggling with their literacy, it is important to talk with their teachers.

### Teachers can:



Use their own professional knowledge as well as formal tests to check if your child is meeting their literacy milestones.

Discover if there is a specific aspect of literacy your child finds hard.

Adapt their teaching to match what your child needs help with.

Arrange for additional support if needed.

## WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO AT HOME?

- Be positive about school learning.
- If you have time, become involved in school-community engagement initiatives.
- Visit your local library together, and help your child choose books on topics they are interested in. Librarians are there to help.
- Model literacy in many different ways (read a book, write a postcard, listen to a podcast, watch a documentary, look up a website, make a shopping list, read a map) and explain what you're reading / writing / hearing / seeing with your child.
- Use e-Readers to give access to lots of books to read and also as way for your child to create and publish their own writing. Don't rely on e-Readers only—they are good supplement but not a replacement for paper books and magazines.
- Encourage your child to use their imagination, be creative and collaborate in discussion, in writing, and in creating visual and digital content.
- Encourage conversations between children, young people, and adults across all ages.
- Listen to what young people have to say.

## REFERENCES AND USEFUL LINKS

### Sources

- <sup>1</sup> ACARA (n.d.). F-10 Curriculum. Learning areas. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/learning-areas/>
- <sup>2</sup> Education Endowment Foundation. (2019). *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools*. Retrieved from <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/improving-literacy-in-secondary-schools/>
- <sup>3</sup> Evidence for Learning. (2020). Improving literacy in secondary schools. <https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/guidance-reports/improving-literacy-in-secondary-schools/>

### Useful links

From Evidence for Learning (Australia):

<https://www.evidenceforlearning.org.au/evidence-informed-educators/webinars/2020/#improving-literacy-in-secondary-school>  
<https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/assets/Webinars/2020/Webinar-Home-Supported-Learning.pdf>

Other Australian sources:

<https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/parent-information/>  
[https://petaa.edu.au/imis\\_prod/w/Teaching\\_Resources/w/Teaching\\_Resources/Parents\\_guide.aspx](https://petaa.edu.au/imis_prod/w/Teaching_Resources/w/Teaching_Resources/Parents_guide.aspx)  
<https://theconversation.com/explainer-how-is-literacy-taught-in-schools-56132>  
<https://theconversation.com/ereaders-arent-destroying-reading-theyre-just-changing-it-34664>  
<https://theconversation.com/how-to-get-teenagers-to-read-42757>  
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/school-education-work>  
[https://qbi.uq.edu.au/brain-activity-booklet?utm\\_source=Learning](https://qbi.uq.edu.au/brain-activity-booklet?utm_source=Learning)

Tasmanian sources:

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/parent-fact-sheets/>  
<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx>

International sources:

<https://literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/ila-engagement-and-adolescent-literacy.pdf>  
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/support-resources-for-schools/>  
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/blog-supporting-parents-to-undertake-brilliant-book-talk/>  
<https://improvingliteracy.org/brief/remote-literacy-learning-coaching-steps-families>  
<https://improvingliteracy.org/brief/supporting-your-childs-literacy-development-home>  
<https://improvingliteracy.org/brief/advocating-my-childs-literacy-needs>  
<http://www.adlit.org/article/27269/>  
<https://hearttohearhomeschooling.com/encourage-your-teens-to-write/>

This is fact sheet #11 (out of 11), produced as part of the  
“Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools”  
and is intended to align with the Department of Education Literacy Plan for Action 2019-2022.  
<https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Literacy-Plan-for-Action-2019-2022.pdf>

For information about the review, other factsheets and five detailed reports, see:

<https://www.utas.edu.au/underwood-centre/research/completed-projects>

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