

## Reading Lesson

**B1+ Services: Being Illiterate in the Modern World**

## Reading

Read the text. How can improving literacy improve lives?

**Being Illiterate in the Modern World**

Most of us take the ability to read for granted. It's easy to forget how dependent we are on that skill to function in the modern world. We read posts and interact with others through social media. We read newspapers, magazines, and websites that keep us up to date with what's happening in the world. We order things online, we apply for loans, and we pay bills and deal with other official communication. All of that is much more difficult or maybe even impossible when you are unable to read and write. Adult illiteracy is an issue that affects people's lives in many different ways, and it's vital that we find ways of addressing the problem.



Being illiterate doesn't necessarily mean that you literally cannot read or write a single word in your native language. The OECD defines six levels of literacy. At the lowest levels, a person is only capable of reading brief texts on familiar topics and finding specific pieces of information by understanding basic vocabulary. A useful idea is that of "functional illiteracy." Someone who is functionally illiterate may be able to read and write in a very simple way, but lacks the skills necessary to function effectively in the modern world. Although globally the numbers are falling, it's a problem that still affects a lot of people. According to a 2017 report from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, around 14% of the global population are illiterate, adding up to around 750 million people—with approximately two-thirds of the total being female.

The highest rates of illiteracy occur in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. In some countries, the education system may be underdeveloped or underfunded, and there may be pressure on people to leave education as soon as possible in order to start earning money that their families need to survive. However, even in developed countries with good education systems, functional illiteracy affects people's lives. According to data from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, 43 million people in the USA have low literacy skills. One of the causes seems to be parents who have little education and don't have books at home. Children from those homes may not be taught the importance of reading and may leave school early. They then grow up into adults who struggle with reading and writing. Other causes include poverty, dropping out of school, and learning disabilities.

In the developing world, the solution to high levels of illiteracy may involve investing in a better education system and encouraging girls, in particular, to stay in education for as long as possible. These young women will then grow up to be adults who understand the importance of education and who can support their own children's learning by helping them to read and by reading books with them. The figures for youth literacy, again from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, are encouraging. While globally 83% of adult females are literate, the figure for those aged 15 and under is 90%.

In the developed world, solving adult illiteracy starts with recognizing learning as a lifelong process. Many illiterate adults feel that they have missed their chance to learn, when in reality it's never too late to develop your skills. Being illiterate also affects confidence, as there are so many areas of life that can be found to be difficult. Literacy programs that are designed to improve adults' reading and writing skills often focus on changing

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people's attitudes toward education so that they feel that learning is possible. Once they overcome some of the psychological barriers to learning, many people realize that even a small improvement in their literacy skills can have a dramatic effect on their lives.

**OECD (n):** Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

**UNESCO (n):** United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

### Vocabulary

Match to complete the sentences.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. When you <b>take</b> something <b>for granted</b> , you ... | <b>a</b> find it very hard to do because you lack the right skills. |
| 2. When you <b>deal with</b> something, you ...                | <b>b</b> assume it happens without thinking about it a lot.         |
| 3. When you <b>struggle with</b> something, you ...            | <b>c</b> succeed in spite of, e.g., a problem.                      |
| 4. When you <b>invest in</b> something, you ...                | <b>d</b> take the necessary action (e.g., to solve a problem).      |
| 5. When you <b>overcome</b> something, you ...                 | <b>e</b> provide money to make it better.                           |

### Comprehension

Choose the correct option.

- One problem with being illiterate is that it's hard to ...
  - perform everyday tasks in the same way as others.
  - find sources of news that you can trust.
  - understand why people spend so much time online.
- If you are functionally illiterate, you ...
  - are below the lowest OECD level.
  - can only read a few words.
  - find it hard to live a full life.

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3. In developed countries, illiteracy may be due to ...
  - a illness.
  - b a lack of good examples.
  - c bad schools.
  
4. According to the writer, when girls are encouraged to stay in education in developing countries, ...
  - a they grow up and start earning money sooner.
  - b they can become teachers in their local area.
  - c it helps the next generation to learn.
  
5. This text is a ...
  - a blog entry.
  - b website article.
  - c business report.

### Thinking

**What is the best way to address the problem of illiteracy in your country?**