

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Literacy has historically been associated with power and success. Literate people have the advantage in the cultures in which they live. With the coming of mass communication, the definition of literacy has been broadened, but its value has not changed. After studying this chapter you should

- n be familiar with the development of written and mass-mediated communication.
- n understand the relationship between communication and culture.
- n understand the relationship between literacy and power.
- n recognize how technologies change the cultures that use them.
- n recognize how mass media technologies have changed the definition of literacy.
- n be aware of the overarching relationships between different mass media and culture, themes to be examined in detail in later chapters.
- n understand media literacy.
- n possess the basis for developing good media literacy skills.
- n be encouraged to practice media literacy.

BABY-SITTING YOUR 3-YEAR-OLD NIECE WAS *NOT* HOW YOU wanted to spend your Saturday night. But family is family, so here you are, watching television with a little kid.

“What do you want to watch?” you ask.

“MTV!” she cheers.

“No. You’re too young.”

“*Friends!*”

“No. It’s too sexy for little kids like you.”

“Mommy lets me watch.”

“Are you telling me the truth?”

“No. How ’bout HBO?”

“Compromise. How about Disney?”

“What means *compromise?*”

“It means we’ll watch Disney.” You punch up the Disney Channel with the remote and settle in to watch what looks like an adolescent action show. Three preteen sleuths are in a low-speed car chase, pursuing a bad guy of some sort.

When the chase takes them into a car wash, your niece asks, “Why are they dreaming?”

“What?!”

“Why are those people dreaming?”

“They’re not dreaming.”

“Then why is the picture going all woosie-like?”

“That’s not woosie-like. That’s the brushes in the car wash going over the windshield. The camera is showing us what they’re seeing. It’s called POV, point of view. It’s when the camera shows what the characters are seeing.”

“I know that! But why are they dreaming? When the picture goes all woosie-like, it means that the people are dreaming!”

“Says who?”

“Says everyone. And when the music gets louder, that means the show’s gonna be over. And when the man talks real loud, that means it’s a commercial. And when stars and moons come out of the kitty’s head, that means it hurts.”

“Can we just be quiet for a little bit?”

“And when there’s blood, it’s really catsup. And when the . . .”

“If I let you watch MTV, will you quiet down?”

“Cool. Deal.”

“Are you really only 3?”

“And a half.”

In this chapter we investigate how we can improve our media literacy skills. Before we can do this, however, we must understand why literacy, in and of itself, is important. Throughout history, literacy has meant power. When communication was primarily oral, the leaders were most often the best storytellers. The printing press ushered in the beginnings of mass communication, and in this primarily print-based environment, power and influence migrated to those who could read.

As literacy spread through various cultures, power began to fragment. The world became increasingly democratic. In today’s modern, mass mediated cultures, literacy is still important, but there are now two forms of literacy—literacy as traditionally understood (the ability to read) and media literacy.

Let’s begin by looking at the development of writing and the formation of **literate culture**. An expanding literate population encouraged technological innovation; the printing press transformed the world. Other communication technology advances have also had a significant impact; however, these technologies cannot be separated from how people have used them. Technology can be used in ways beneficial and otherwise. The skilled, beneficial use of media technologies is the goal of media literacy.

A Cultural History of Mass Communication

Our quick trip through the history of mass communication begins at the beginning, in cultures whose only form of communication was oral.

ORAL CULTURE

Oral or **preliterate cultures** are those without a written language. Virtually all communication must be face-to-face, and this fact helps to define the culture, its structure, and its operation. Whether they existed thousands of years ago before writing was developed or still function today (for example, among certain Eskimo peoples and African tribes where **griots**, or “talking chiefs,” provide oral histories of their people going back hundreds of years), oral cultures are remarkably alike. They share these characteristics:

The meaning in language is specific and local. As a result, communities are closely knit, and their members are highly dependent on each other for all aspects of life.

Knowledge must be passed on orally. People must be *shown* and *told* how to do something.

Therefore, skilled hunters, farmers, midwives, and the like hold a special status; they are the living embodiments of culture.

Memory is crucial. As repositories of cultural customs and traditions, elders are revered; they are responsible for passing knowledge on to the next generation.

Myth and history are intertwined. Storytellers are highly valued; they are the meaning makers, and, like the elders, they pass on what is important to the culture.

What does the resulting culture look like? People know each other intimately and rely on one another for survival. Roles are clearly defined. Stories teach important cultural lessons and preserve important cultural traditions and values. Control over communication is rarely necessary, but when it is, it is easily achieved through social sanctions.

THE INVENTION OF WRITING

Writing, the first communication technology, complicates this simple picture. More than 5,000 years ago, alphabets were developed independently in several places around the world. **Ideogrammatic** (picture-based) **alphabets** appeared in Egypt (as hieroglyphics), Sumeria (as cuneiform), and urban China.

Ideogrammatic alphabets require a huge number of symbols to convey even the simplest idea. Their complexity meant that only a very select few, an intellectual elite, could read or write. For writing to truly serve effective and efficient communication, one more advance was required.

The Sumerians were international traders, maintaining trade routes throughout known Europe, Africa, and Asia. The farther the Sumerian people traveled, the less they could rely on face-to-face communication and the greater their need for a more precise writing form. Sumerian cuneiform slowly expanded, using symbols to represent sounds rather than objects and ideas. Appearing around 1800 B.C., these were the first elements of a **syllable alphabet**—an alphabet employing sequences of vowels and consonants, that is, words.

The syllable alphabet as we know it today slowly developed, aided greatly by ancient Semitic cultures, and eventually flowered in Greece around 800 B.C. Like the Sumerians long before them, the Greeks perfected their easy alphabet of necessity. Having little in the way of natural resources, the Greek city-states depended and thrived on bustling trade routes all around the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. For orders to be placed, deals arranged, manifests compiled, and records kept, writing that was easy to learn, use, and understand was required.

A medium was necessary to carry this new form of communication. The Sumerians had used clay tablets, but the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans eventually employed **papyrus**, rolls of sliced strips of reed pressed together. Around 100 B.C. the Romans began using **parchment**, a writing material made from prepared animal skins, and in A.D. 105 medieval Chinese bureaucrat Ts'ai Lun perfected a paper-making process employing a mixture of pressed mulberry tree bark, water, rags, and a sophisticated frame for drying and stretching the resulting sheets of paper. This technology made its way to Europe through various trade routes some 600 years later.

Literate Culture

With the coming of **literacy**—the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use written symbols—the social and cultural rules and structures of preliterate times began to change. People could accumulate a permanent body of knowledge and transmit that knowledge from one generation to another. Among the changes that writing brought were these:

Meaning and language became more uniform. The words “a bolt of cloth” had to mean the same to a reader in Mesopotamia as they did to one in Sicily. Over time, communities became less closely knit and their members less dependent on one another. The definition of “community” expanded to include people outside the local area.

Communication could occur over long distances and long periods of time. With knowledge being transmitted in writing, power shifted from those who could show others their special talents to those who could write and read about them.

The culture's memory, history, and myth could be recorded on paper. With written histories, elders and storytellers began to lose their status, and new elites developed. Homer (some historians believe he was actually several scribes), for example, compiled in written form several generations of oral stories and histories that we know as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

What did the resulting culture look like? It was no longer local. Its members could survive not only by hunting or farming together but by commercial, political, or military expansion. Empires replaced communities. There was more compartmentalization of people based on what they did to earn a living—bakers baked, herders herded, merchants sold goods. Yet, at the same time, role and status were less permanently fixed. Slaves who learned to read to serve their masters took on new duties for those masters and rose in status.

Power and influence now resided not in the strongest hunter, wisest elder, or most engaging storyteller but in those who could read and write; that is, power and influence now rested with those who were literate. They could best engage in widespread official communication, and they wrote the histories and passed on cultural values and lessons. With this change from preliterate to literate culture, the first stirrings of a new political philosophy were born. Reading and writing encouraged more open and robust debate, political exchange, and criticism of the powerful; in other words, it fostered democracy.

It is important to remember that in the newly literate cultures, communication was still quite limited. An orator could address at most a few hundred people at a time. Writers could reach only those literate few who held their handwritten scrolls or letters. The printing press would change this, making it possible to duplicate communication, thereby expanding our ability to communicate with one another.

THE GUTENBERG REVOLUTION

It is impossible to overstate the importance of Johannes Gutenberg's development of movable metal type. Historian S. H. Steinberg wrote in *Five Hundred Years of Printing*:

Neither political, constitutional, ecclesiastical, and economic, nor sociological, philosophical, and literary movements can be fully understood without taking into account the influence the printing press has exerted upon them. (1959, p. 11)

Marshall McLuhan expressed his admiration for Gutenberg's innovation by calling his 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. In it he argued that the advent of print is the key to our modern consciousness. Why was Gutenberg's invention so important? Simply, because it allowed *mass* communication.

The Printing Press Printing and the printing press existed long before Gutenberg perfected his process in or around 1446. The Chinese were using wooden block presses as early as A.D. 600 and had movable clay type by A.D. 1000. A simple movable metal type was even in use in Korea in the 13th century. Gutenberg's printing press was a significant leap forward, however, for two important reasons.

Gutenberg was a goldsmith and a metallurgist. He hit upon the idea of using metal type crafted from lead molds in place of type made from wood or clay. This was an important advance. Not only was movable metal type durable enough to print page after page, but letters could be arranged and rearranged to make any message possible. And Gutenberg was able to produce virtually identical copies. In addition, Gutenberg's advance over Korean metal mold printing was one of scope and intention. The Korean press was used to produce attractive artwork. Gutenberg saw his invention as a way to produce books—many books—for profit. He was, however, a poor businessman. He stressed quality over quantity, in part because of his reverence for the book he was printing, the Bible. He used the highest quality paper and ink and turned out far fewer volumes than he otherwise could have.

Other printers, however, quickly saw the true economic potential of Gutenberg's invention. The first Gutenberg Bible appeared in 1456. By the end of that century, 44 years later, printing operations existed in 12 European countries, and the continent was flooded with 20 million volumes of 7,000 titles in 35,000 different editions (Drucker, 1999).

The Impact of Print Although Gutenberg developed his printing press with a limited use in mind, printing Bibles, the cultural effects of mass printing have been profound.

Handwritten or hand-copied materials were expensive to produce, and the cost of an education, in time and money, had made reading an expensive luxury. However, with the spread of printing, written communication was available to a much larger portion of the population, and the need for literacy among the lower and middle classes grew. The ability to read became less of a luxury and more of a necessity; eventually literacy spread, as did education. Soldiers at the front needed to be able to read the emperor's orders. Butchers needed to understand the king's shopping list. So the demand for literacy expanded, and more (and more types of) people learned to read.

Tradespeople, soldiers, clergy, bakers, and musicians all now had business at the printer's shop. They talked. They learned of things, both in conversation and by reading printed material. As more people learned to read, new ideas germinated and spread and cross-pollination of ideas occurred.

More material from various sources was published, and people were freer to read what they wanted when they wanted. Dominant authorities—the Crown and the Church—were now less able to control communication and, therefore, the culture. New ideas about the world appeared; new understandings of the existing world flourished.

In addition, duplication permitted standardization and preservation. Myth and superstition began to make way for standard, verifiable bodies of knowledge. History, economics, physics, and chemistry all became part of the culture's intellectual life. Literate cultures were now on the road to modernization.

Printed materials were the first mass-produced product, speeding the development and entrenchment of capitalism. We live today in a world built on these changes. Use of the printing press helped fuel the establishment and growth of a large middle class. No longer were societies composed of rulers and subjects; printing sped the rise of democracy. No longer were power and wealth functions of birth. Power and wealth could now be created by the industrious. No longer was political discourse limited to accepting the dictates of Crown and Church. Printing had given ordinary people a powerful voice.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

By the mid-18th century the printing press had become one of the engines driving the Industrial Revolution. Print was responsible for building and disseminating bodies of knowledge, leading to scientific and technological developments and the refinement of new machines. In addition, industrialization reduced the time necessary to complete work, and this created something heretofore unknown to most working people—leisure time.

Industrialization had another effect as well. As workers left their sunrise-to-sunset jobs in agriculture, the crafts, and trades to work in the newly industrialized factories, not only did they have more leisure time but they had more money to spend on their leisure. Farmers, fishermen, and tile makers had to put their profits back into their jobs. But factory workers took their money home; it was spendable. Combine leisure time and expendable cash with the spread of literacy and the result is a large and growing audience for printed *information* and *entertainment*. By the mid-19th century, a mass audience and the means to reach it existed.

“Modern” Communication Technologies: The Printing Press of Their Time

Every major advance in mass communication technology has affected the cultures that used it, just as the printing press changed Western Europe. Today, many experts argue that television and computers are equal in influence to Gutenberg's marvel. Whether you agree or not, there is no doubt that the introduction of mass market newspapers and magazines, motion pictures, radio, television, and computers has created a world markedly different from that which existed before their arrival. All media will be examined in detail in upcoming chapters, but here are thumbnail sketches of the tremendous, but often overlooked, restructuring of everyday life that these media fostered.

Newspapers, Magazines, Motion Pictures, and Radio

The printing press made newspapers and magazines possible, but it was technological and social changes brought about by industrialization that gave us *mass market* newspapers and magazines. As these media were flourishing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, motion pictures and radio were also developing. Taken together, these communication technologies spoke to and for the growing lower- and middle-class populations of the United States. This was a time of remarkable transformation.

The westward migration that had begun in the 1840s was in full force, and immigrants from Asia and Europe were pouring into the United States in search of jobs and opportunity. Former slaves and their children began moving north to the great industrial cities in the late 1860s, looking for freedom and dignity as well as work. Industry was producing consumer products such as electric lights and telephones that once were only dreams. Organized labor was agitating for a greater say in workers' lives. Government was struggling to deal with duties and responsibilities unimagined 20 years earlier.

Into the middle of this volatile brew came the new mass market media. Foreign-speaking immigrants and unschooled laborers could be informed and entertained by movies or radio; minimal reading skill was required. Mass market newspapers and magazines were simple to read and full of pictures and cartoons, accessible even to newly literate immigrants and uneducated former slaves. Movies were silent, requiring no reading ability at all, and radios in the 1920s were inexpensive to own and demanded nothing more of listeners than the ability to hear. For the first time in history, an entire population was able to participate in cultural communication.

Mass market newspapers and magazines, motion pictures, and radio helped unify a rapidly expanding, pluralistic, multiethnic country; created and nourished the U.S. middle class; and established, supported, and solidified the roots of the U.S. consumer economy.

Television

Television was no less influential than these media. Its diffusion throughout U.S. homes was phenomenal. Figure 2.1 shows this remarkable rate of growth.

Television was virtually nonexistent in 1945 at the end of World War II, with only 10,000 sets in people's homes, and those exclusively in major urban areas. A short 14 years later, 54 million households had televisions. The country that welcomed television was as much in a state of transformation as the one that had already greeted mass market newspapers, magazines, movies, and radio.

World War II further removed the United States from its primarily rural, small-town identity. It was fast becoming a global industrial giant. More people now worked shorter weeks (40 hours) and had increased leisure time—and money to spend. The manufacturing capabilities refined for the war effort were retooled for the manufacture of consumer products—cars, golf clubs, sportswear—that took advantage of this free time and money. Because people needed to know about these new products in order to buy them, advertising expanded.

Minorities who had fought for freedom in Europe and Asia demanded it at home. Some women who had entered the workforce while the men were at war remained on the job, but many others returned to their homes in the 1950s. However, by the 1960s and 1970s women were questioning their domestic role. This, as well as economic necessity, contributed to the reentry of women into the workforce in even greater numbers. The trend toward both Mom and Dad working outside the home was set. People left their small towns to move nearer the factories, and traditional communities began to dissolve.

Historically important anchors such as school and church lost their hold over children, and thanks to the postwar baby boom, there were teenagers aplenty when television became a mass medium.

Television became a true mass medium in 1960, reaching into 90% of all U.S. homes. At that time the United States was characterized by social and racial unrest. The youth revolution of “sex, drugs, and rock ’n’ roll” took hold in that decade, as did economic growth accompanied by rampant commercialism and consumerism. There were dramatic rises in violence of all kinds, especially teen violence and juvenile delinquency. Television was smack in the middle of this social and cultural sea change.

Did the new medium *cause* this transformation? No, television did not cause these profound alterations in our culture. To make that argument is to take the transmissional view. But if we apply Carey’s ritual perspective (see Chapter 1) to one example from that era—the success of the Civil Rights movement—it is easy to understand the cultural importance of mass communication in our lives.

It is impossible to imagine the Civil Rights movement succeeding without the ugly televised pictures of Southern cops and their dogs descending on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his peaceful marchers. The ability of television to convey “representations of shared belief” was central to Dr. King’s strategy. He believed Americans were basically good and fair and that they shared a fundamental belief in freedom and equality. Dr. King’s plan worked; people of conscience were shocked at scenes of nonresisting marchers being bludgeoned. After seeing televised news reports from Selma, Alabama, President John F. Kennedy is reported to have turned to his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and said, “We must now act. The American people will not stand for this.” He then dedicated the power of his office to the movement.

Computer Networks

The United States in the first decade of the new century, much like the country that greeted television, is a nation in transition. It has “won” the Cold War, but its citizens are not coming home to a changed culture as they did in 1945; they never left. Yet the rules have changed anyway. The United States exists in a different world than that which followed World War II. It is one player in the global economy, and the nature of work has changed. The service industries—retailing, telecommunications, social services—now provide more jobs than manufacturing.

In the midst of this change are the new computer technologies. The information society, the electronic superhighway, the information infrastructure, and virtual reality were dreams 30 years ago. Individuals can communicate electronically in an instant with one person or 10 million people. People search for and retrieve information from the world’s most sophisticated libraries, newspapers, and databases without ever leaving their homes. Many workers telecommute, rarely visiting the office. More and more, homes are *becoming* people’s offices. We are an **information society**—a society wherein the creation and exchange of information is the dominant social and economic activity.

We cannot be certain yet how this information society will evolve, but many issues are already being debated, as you will see in virtually every chapter that follows. For example, what becomes of those who cannot afford to be linked, wired, and online? Will computer technologies divide the nation into information haves and have-nots? What new communities will develop? Who owns information? What skills will be needed to succeed professionally and personally? To what extent should government be

involved in creating and maintaining computer networks? Should there be official policing of content?

These are questions about the use and control of a new medium. Throughout history, whenever new communication technologies have been introduced, societies have inevitably confronted similar questions (see the box “The Dangers of Papyrus”). The concern, obviously, is with how best to use the strengths of the emerging medium and how to minimize its disruptive potential. This is just one element, albeit an important one, of media literacy.

Media Literacy

Television influences our culture in innumerable ways. One of its effects, according to many people, is that it has encouraged violence in our society. For example, American television viewers overwhelmingly say there is too much violence on television. Yet almost without exception, the local television news program that has the largest proportion of violence in its nightly newscast is the ratings leader. “If it bleeds, it leads” has become the motto for much of local television news. It leads because people watch.

So, although many of us are quick to condemn improper media performance or to identify and lament its harmful effects, we rarely question our own role in the mass communication process. We overlook it because we participate in mass communication naturally, almost without conscious effort. We possess high-level interpretive and comprehension skills that make even the most sophisticated television show, movie, or magazine story understandable and enjoyable. We are able, through a lifetime of interaction with the media, to *read media texts*. Recall the opening vignette. That 3-year-old was already exhibiting a fairly high level of skill at reading television texts. Maybe her skills are not as sophisticated as yours—she did not know POV, for example—but in her short life she has already become a fairly skilled viewer.

Media literacy is a skill we take for granted, but like all skills, it can be improved. And if we consider how important the mass media are in creating and maintaining the culture that helps define us and our lives, it is a skill that *must* be improved.

Hunter College media professor Stuart Ewen emphasized this point in comparing media literacy with traditional literacy. “Historically,” he wrote, “links between literacy and democracy are inseparable from the notion of an informed populace, conversant with the issues that touch upon their lives, enabled with tools that allow them to participate actively in public deliberation and social change. . . . Literacy was about crossing the lines that had historically separated men of ideas from ordinary people, about the enfranchisement of those who had been excluded from the compensations of citizenship” (2000, p. 448). To Ewen, and others committed to media literacy, media literacy represents no less than the means to full participation in the culture.

Elements of Media Literacy

Earlier we defined literacy as the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use written symbols. With the development of nonprint-based media, however, that definition must be expanded to include the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and utilize *any form of communication*. When speaking specifically of participation in mass communication, this ability is called **media literacy**.

Media literacy can mean somewhat different things to different observers, as shown in the box “Defining Media Literacy.” What each of its definitions has in common, however, is the idea that media consumers must develop the “ability” or “facility” to better

interpret media content. So, for our purposes, media literacy is the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and utilize mass media content.

Media scholar Art Silverblatt (1995) identified five fundamental elements of media literacy. To these we will add two more. Media literacy includes these characteristics:

1. *An awareness of the impact of media.* Writing and the printing press helped change the world and the people in it. Mass media do the same. If we ignore the impact of media on our lives, we run the risk of being caught up and carried along by that change rather than controlling or leading it.
2. *An understanding of the process of mass communication.* If we know the components of the mass communication process and how they relate to one another, we can form expectations of how they can serve us. How do the various media industries operate? What are their obligations to us? What are the obligations of the audience? How do different media limit or enhance messages? Which forms of feedback are most effective, and why?
3. *Strategies for analyzing and discussing media messages.* To consume media messages thoughtfully, we need a foundation on which to base thought and reflection. If we make meaning, we must possess the tools with which to make it (for example, understanding the intent and impact of film and video conventions like camera angles and lighting, or the strategy behind the placement of photos on a newspaper page). Otherwise, meaning is made for us; the interpretation of media content will then rest with its creator, not with us.
4. *An understanding of media content as a text that provides insight into our culture and our lives.* How do we know a culture and its people, attitudes, values, concerns, and myths? We know them through communication. For modern cultures like ours, media messages increasingly dominate that communication, shaping our understanding of and insight into our culture. Some groups feel so strongly about the potential of the media to shape culture that they have attempted to take back some of that power themselves. See the box “Media Literacy as the Struggle for Power” on page 54 for more information about media literacy as a power issue.
5. *The ability to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content.* Media literacy does not mean living the life of a grump, liking nothing in the media, or always being suspicious of harmful effects and cultural degradation. We take high school and college classes to enhance our understanding and appreciation of novels; we can do the same for media texts.

Learning to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content includes the ability to use **multiple points of access**—to approach media content from a variety of directions and derive from it many levels of meaning. Thus, we control meaning making for our own enjoyment or appreciation. For example, we can enjoy the 2002 Steven Spielberg movie *Minority Report* as an exciting piece of cinematic science fiction. But we can also understand it as a thrilling whodunit in the film noir tradition. Or we can access it at the point of its cultural meaning. What, for example, does the operation of the precrime unit have to say about the holding and detaining of “suspected” individuals, say, terrorists? How does the erasure of the many minority reports reflect on the fairness of the judicial system, especially in capital cases? Just how much freedom are we willing to give up to feel safe?

In fact, television programs such as *Arli\$\$*, *Sex and the City*, *The Simpsons*, *Malcolm in the Middle*, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* are specifically constructed to take advantage of the media literacy skills of sophisticated viewers while providing entertaining fare for less skilled consumers. The same is true for such films as *Pulp Fiction*, *Dogma*, and *Being John Malkovich*, magazines such as *Mondo 2000*, and the best of jazz, rap, and rock. *Arli\$\$* and *Sex and the City* are produced as television comedies, designed to make people laugh. But they are also intentionally produced in a manner that provides more sophisticated, media literate viewers with opportunities to make more personally interesting

or relevant meaning. Anyone can laugh while watching these programs, but some people can investigate hypocrisy in professional sports (*Arlit\$\$*), or they can examine what goes on inside the heads of young and middle-aged women looking for love (*Sex and the City*).

6. *An understanding of the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners.* To make informed judgments about the performance of the media, we also must be aware of the competing pressures on practitioners as they do their jobs. We must understand the media's official and unofficial rules of operation. In other words, we must know, respectively, their legal and ethical obligations. Return, for a moment, to the question of televised violence. It is legal for a station to air graphic violence. But is it ethical? If it is unethical, what power, if any, do we have to demand its removal from our screens? Dilemmas such as this are discussed at length in Chapter 14.

7. *Development of appropriate and effective production skills.* Traditional literacy assumes that people who can read can also write. Media literacy also makes this assumption. Our definition of literacy (of either type) calls not only for effective and efficient comprehension of content but for its effective and efficient *use*. Therefore, media literate individuals should develop production skills that enable them to create useful media messages. If you have ever tried to make a narrative home video—one that tells a story—you know that producing content is much more difficult than consuming it. Even producing a taped answering machine message that is not embarrassing is a daunting task for many people.

This element of media literacy may seem relatively unimportant at first glance. After all, if you choose a career in media production, you will get training in school and on the job. If you choose another calling, you may never be in the position of having to produce content. But most professions now employ some form of media to disseminate information, for use in training, to enhance presentations, or to keep in contact with clients and customers. The Internet and the World Wide Web, in particular, require effective production skills of their users—at home, school, and work—because online receivers can and do easily become online creators.

MEDIA LITERACY SKILLS

Consuming media content is simple. Push a button and you have television pictures or music on a radio. Come up with enough cash and you can see a movie or buy a magazine. Media literate consumption, however, requires a number of specific skills:

1. *The ability and willingness to make an effort to understand content, to pay attention, and to filter out noise.* As we saw in Chapter 1, anything that interferes with successful communication is called noise, and much of the noise in the mass communication process results from our own consumption behavior. When we watch television, often we are also doing other things, such as eating, reading, or chatting on the phone. We drive while we listen to the radio. Obviously, the quality of our meaning making is related to the effort we give it.

2. *An understanding of and respect for the power of media messages.* The mass media have been around for more than a century and a half. Just about everybody can enjoy them. Their content is either free or relatively inexpensive. Much of the content is banal and a bit silly, so it is easy to dismiss media content as beneath serious consideration or too simple to have any influence.

We also disregard media's power through the **third person effect**—the common attitude that others are influenced by media messages but that we are not. That is, we are media literate enough to understand the influence of mass communication on the attitudes, behaviors, and values of others but not self-aware or honest enough to see it in our own lives.

3. *The ability to distinguish emotional from reasoned reactions when responding to content and to act accordingly.* Media content is often designed to touch us at the emotional level. We enjoy losing

ourselves in a good song or in a well-crafted movie or television show; this is among our great pleasures. But because we react emotionally to these messages does not mean they don't have serious meanings and implications for our lives. Television pictures, for example, are intentionally shot and broadcast for their emotional impact. Reacting emotionally is appropriate and proper. But then what? What do these pictures tell us about the larger issue at hand? We can use our feelings as a point of departure for meaning making. We can ask, "Why does this content make me feel this way?"

4. *Development of heightened expectations of media content.* We all use media to tune out, waste a little time, and provide background noise. When we decide to watch television, we are more likely to turn on the set and flip channels until we find something passable than we are to read the listings to find a specific program to view. When we are at the video store, we often settle for anything because "It's just a rental." When we expect little from the content before us, we tend to give meaning making little effort and attention.

5. *A knowledge of genre conventions and the ability to recognize when they are being mixed.* The term **genre** refers to the categories of expression within the different media, such as "the evening news," "documentary," "horror movie," or "entertainment magazine." Each genre is characterized by certain distinctive, standardized style elements—the **conventions** of that genre. The conventions of the evening news, for example, include a short, upbeat introductory theme and one or two good-looking people sitting at a space-age desk. When we hear and see these style elements, we expect the evening news. We can tell a documentary film from an entertainment movie by its more serious tone and the number of "talking heads." We know by their appearance—the use of color and the amount of text on the cover—which magazines offer serious reading and which provide entertainment.

Knowledge of these conventions is important because they cue or direct our meaning making. For example, we know to accept the details in a documentary film about the sinking of the *Titanic* as more credible than those found in a Hollywood movie about that disaster.

This skill is also important for a second reason. Sometimes, in an effort to maximize audiences (and therefore profits) or for creative reasons, media content makers mix genre conventions. Are Oliver Stone's *Nixon* and *JFK* fact or fiction? Is Geraldo Rivera a journalist, a talk show host, or a showman? Is *G.I. Joe* a kid's cartoon or a 30-minute - commercial? *Extra!* and *E! Daily News* look increasingly like *Dateline NBC* and the *CBS Evening News*. Reading media texts becomes more difficult as formats are co-opted.

6. *The ability to think critically about media messages, no matter how credible their sources.* It is crucial that media be credible in a democracy in which the people govern because the media are central to the governing process. This is why the news media are sometimes referred to as the fourth branch of government, complementing the executive, judicial, and legislative branches. This does not mean, however, that we should believe everything they report. But it is often difficult to arrive at the proper - balance between wanting to believe and accepting what we see and hear unquestioningly, especially when frequently we are willing to suspend disbelief and are encouraged by the media themselves to see their content as real and credible.

Consider the *New York Times* motto, "All the News That's Fit to Print," and the title "Eyewitness News." If it is all there, it must all be real, and who is more credible than an eyewitness? But if we examine these media, we would learn that the *Times* in actuality prints all the news that fits (in its pages) and that the news is, at best, a very selective eyewitness.

7. *A knowledge of the internal language of various media and the ability to understand its effects, no matter how complex.* Just as each media genre has its own distinctive style and conventions, each medium also has its own specific internal language. This language is expressed in **production values**_the

choice of lighting, editing, special effects, music, camera angle, location on the page, and size and placement of headline. To be able to read a media text, you must understand its language. We learn the grammar of this language automatically from childhood—for example, “the picture going all woosie-like” from the opening vignette.

Let’s consider two versions of the same movie scene. In the first, a man is driving a car. Cut to a woman lying tied up on a railroad track. What is the relationship between the man and the woman? Where is he going? With no more information than these two shots, you know automatically that he cares for her and is on his way to save her. Now, here is the second version. The man is driving the car. Fade to black. Fade back up to the woman on the tracks. Now what is the relationship between the man and the woman? Where is he going? It is less clear that these two people even have anything to do with each other. We construct completely different meanings from exactly the same two pictures because the punctuation (the quick cut/fade) differs.

Media texts tend to be more complicated than these two scenes. The better we can handle their grammar, the more we can understand and appreciate texts. The more we understand texts, the more we can be equal partners with media professionals in meaning making.

“Complete” media literacy is difficult to achieve, but it is a worthy goal. Reading and understanding the model of media literacy shown in Figure 2.2 is a good place to start your own personal journey toward fuller media literacy.

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

More on Storytelling

WWW.

storynet.org

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

This Sumerian cuneiform dates from 700 years before the birth of Christ.

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

This Egyptian funeral papyrus depicts the weighing of a heart when a person dies.

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

Project Gutenberg

WWW.

promo.net/pg/

This page from a Gutenberg Bible shows the exquisite care the printer used in creating his works. The artwork in the margins is handpainted, but the text is mechanically printed.

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

Johannes Gutenberg takes the first proof from his printing press.

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

More on the Industrial Revolution

WWW.

fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook14.html

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

For more information on this topic, see NBC Video Clip #1 on the CD—*Media Professionals Discuss State of the Media*.

Mass circulation newspapers brought everyday people into the cultural dialogue, as depicted in this 1873 painting by Edgar Degas, *The Interior of the Cotton Market in New Orleans*.

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

Figure 2.1 Growth of Television in the United States. *Source:* Census data and *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook*; various years.

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

Television may not have “caused” the Civil Rights movement, but Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s adroit use of the medium’s ability to bring scenes like this into people’s homes surely aided the cause.

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

Among the overlooked cultural changes wrought by the Internet is the explosion of home offices and telecommuting. These phenomena, in turn, produced their own effect, the emergence of the office supply super store.

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

The Dangers of Papyrus

New communication technologies invariably are met with concern. Today’s debate surrounds the impact of the Internet and the World Wide Web. On April Fools’ Day 1997, the *ABC Evening News* offered this report:

WORLD NEWS NOW (THEN) Egypt’s emerging papyrus technology continues to alarm parents and law enforcement. A new bill introduced today would let the government regulate material found on papyrus. Legislators said paperspace, as it is known to so-called writers, is becoming a haven for monotheists, con artists, and worse, hoping to prey on the young and the gullible. A little bit later in the broadcast we will have some tips on how to shield your children from offensive and dangerous - material found on the papyrus.

Clearly, this is a humorous take on the current debate in our cultural forum over the Internet. What is your own opinion?

Center for Media Literacy

WWW.

medialit.org/

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

For more information on this topic, see NBC Video Clip #8 on the CD—*Debating the Effects of TV Violence*.

Media Education Foundation

WWW.

igc.org/mef

Center for Media Education

WWW.

cme.org/cme

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

Defining Media Literacy

Media literacy takes on slightly different meanings depending on the orientation of the person or organization doing the defining. In a special issue of the *Journal of Communication* dedicated to media literacy, media researcher Alan Rubin cited these definitions of media literacy.

From the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy: *the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages* (1998, p. 3).

From media scholar Paul Messaris: *knowledge about how media function in society* (1998, p. 3).

From mass communication researchers Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally: *understanding cultural, economic, political, and technological constraints on the creation, production, and transmission of messages* (1998, p. 3).

Rubin went on to provide his own definition of media literacy:

Media literacy, then, is about understanding the sources and technologies of communication, the codes that are used, the messages that are produced, and the selection, interpretation, and impact of those messages. (p. 3)

In that same issue, communication scholars William Christ and W. James Potter offered their view of media literacy:

Most conceptualizations (of media literacy) include the following elements: Media are constructed and construct reality; media have commercial implications; media have ideological and political implications; form and content are related in each medium, each of which has a unique aesthetic, codes, and conventions; and receivers negotiate meaning in media. (1998, pp. 7–8)

The Cultural Environment Movement (“The People’s Communication Charter,” 1996), a public interest group devoted to increasing literacy as a way to combat corporate takeover of media, suggests this definition:

The right to acquire information and skills necessary to participate fully in public deliberation and communication. This requires facility in reading, writing, and storytelling; critical media awareness; computer literacy; and education about the role of communication in society. (p. 1)

The National Communication Association (1996), a professional scholarly organization composed largely of university academics, offers this description of media literacy:

Being a critical and reflective consumer of communication requires an understanding of how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in ways that are both subtle and profound. Mass media such as radio, television, and film and electronic media such as the telephone, the Internet, and computer conferencing influence the way meanings are created and shared in contemporary society. So great is this impact that in choosing how to send a message and evaluate its effect, communicators need to be aware of the distinctive characteristics of each medium. (p. 2)

These definitions are currently in play in the cultural forum. How would you assess the worth of each? Identify the one most useful for you and defend your choice.

For more information on this topic, see NBC Video Clip #2 on the CD—*Author James Steyer Discusses His Book The Other Parent*.

Media Awareness Network

WWW.

schoolnet.ca/medianet

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

Some people see media literacy as essential if the public is to be fully engaged in our democracy. As such, they see media literacy as a struggle for power. How might these people interpret this cartoon? How do you interpret it?

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

Media Literacy as the Struggle for Power

Some approaches to media literacy are avowedly political; that is, they see media literacy in terms of the struggle - between disadvantaged audiences and powerful media industries. Media historian and critic Robert Mc- Chesney has written passionately on this issue. The Cultural Environment Movement, a coalition of 150 independent organizations with supporters in 64 countries, and Paper Tiger Television, a group that uses public access television to boost media literacy, also address this issue. Here are their approaches to media literacy. Are these the rantings of paranoid, antimedia zealots, or do these approaches have merit?

The Cultural Environment Movement (“The People’s Communication Charter,” 1996, p. 4) issued its *Viewers’ Declaration of Independence* at its founding convention. Here are excerpts:

Viewers’ Declaration of Independence

This declaration originated at the Founding Convention of the Cultural Environment Movement (CEM) in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A., on March 17, 1996. It was revised following suggestions by a committee elected at the convention.

We hold these truths to be self-evident:

That all persons are endowed with the right to live in a cultural environment that is respectful of their humanity and supportive of their potential.

That all children are endowed with the right to grow up in a cultural environment that fosters responsibility, trust, and community rather than force, fear, and violence.

That when the cultural environment becomes destructive of these ends, it is necessary to alter it.

Such is the necessity that confronts us. Let the world hear the reasons that compel us to assert our rights and to take an active role in the shaping of our common cultural environment.

1. Humans live and learn by stories. Today they are no longer hand-crafted, home-made, community-inspired. They are no longer told by families, schools, or churches but are the products of a complex mass-production and marketing process. Scottish patriot Andrew Fletcher once said, “If one were permitted to make all the ballads, one need not care who should make the laws of a nation.” Today most of our “ballads”—the myths and stories of our culture—are made by a small group of global conglomerates that have something to sell.

2. This radical transformation of our cultural environment has changed the roles we grow into, the way we employ creative talent, the way we raise our children, and the way we manage our affairs. Communication channels proliferate but technologies converge and media merge. Consolidation of ownership denies entry to newcomers, drives independents out of the mainstream, and reduces diversity of content. Media blend into a seamless homogenized cultural environment that constrains life’s choices as much as the degradation of the physical environment limits life’s chances.

3. This change did not come about spontaneously or after thoughtful deliberation. It was imposed on an un-informed public and is enshrined in legislation rushed through Congress without any opportunity for public scrutiny or debate about its consequences and worldwide fallout. The airways, a global commons, have been given away to media empires.

4. In exchange for that give-away, we are told, we get “free” entertainment and news, but in truth, we pay dearly, both as consumers and as citizens. The price of soap we buy includes a surcharge for the commercials that bring us the “soap opera.” We pay when we wash, not when we watch. And we pay even if we do not watch or do not like the way of life promoted. This is taxation without representation. Furthermore, the advertising expenditures that buy our media are a tax-deductible business expense. Money diverted from the public treasury pays for an invisible, unelected, unaccountable, private Ministry of Culture making decisions that shape public policy behind closed doors.

5. The human consequences are also far-reaching. They include cults of media violence that desensitize, terrorize, brutalize and paralyze; the promotion of unhealthy practices that pollute, drug, hurt, poison, and kill thousands every day; portrayals that dehumanize, stereotype, marginalize and stigmatize women, racial and ethnic groups, gays and lesbians, aging or disabled or physically or mentally ill persons, and others outside the cultural mainstream.

6. These distortions of the democratic process divert attention from the basic needs, problems and aspirations of people. They conceal the drift toward ecological suicide; the silent crumbling of our vital infrastructure; the cruel neglect of children, poor people, and other vulnerable populations; the invasions of privacy at home and in the workplace; the growing inequalities of wealth and opportunity; the profits made from throwing millions of people on the scrapheap of the unemployed; the commercialization of the classroom; and the downgrading of education and the arts.

7. Global marketing formulas, imposed on media workers and foisted on the children of the world, colonize, monopolize and homogenize cultures everywhere. Technocratic fantasies mask social realities that further widen the gaps between the information rich and the information poor.

8. Repeated protests and petitions have been ignored or dismissed as attempts at “censorship” by the media magnates who alone have the power to suppress and to censor. No constitutional protection or legislative prospect

will help us to loosen the noose of market censorship or to counter the repressive direction the “culture wars” are taking us. We need a liberating alternative.

We, therefore, declare our independence from a system that has drifted out of democratic reach. Our CEM offers the liberating alternative: an independent citizen voice in cultural policymaking, working for the creation of a free, fair, diverse, and responsible cultural environment for us and our children.

Paper Tiger Television was founded in 1981, and at that time issued its *Manifesto*, which reads in part:

The power of mass culture rests on the trust of the public. This legitimacy is a paper tiger. Investigation into the corporate structures of the media and critical analysis of their content is one way to demystify the information industry. Developing a critical consciousness about the communications industry is a necessary first step toward democratic control of information resources. (online: <<http://www.papertiger.org>>)

McChesney bases his call for more widespread and sophisticated media literacy on the threat posed by the “corporate takeover” of our media system. He writes:

The very issue of who controls the media system and for what purposes is not part of contemporary political debate. Instead, there is the presumption that a profit-seeking, commercial media system is fundamentally sound, and that most problems can be resolved for the most part through less state interference or regulation, which (theoretically) will produce the magic elixir of competition. In view of the extraordinary importance of media and communication in our society, I believe that the subject of how media are controlled, structured, and subsidized should be at the center of democratic debate. Instead, this subject is nowhere to be found. This is not an accident; it reflects above all the economic, political, and ideological power of the media corporations and their allies. And it has made the prospect of challenging corporate media power, and of democratizing communication, all the more daunting. (1999a, p. 7)

Alliance for a Media Literate America

WWW.

nmec.org/medialit.html

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

Paper Tiger TV

WWW.

papertiger.org

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

Media Education

WWW.

mediaeducation.com

Association for Media Literacy

WWW.

aml.ca

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

Media Alliance

WWW.

media-alliance.org

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

The sets of each of these newscasts share certain characteristics. Yet we know them to be very different types of - programs with quite different definitions of what constitutes news. Why do you think the producers of *Extra!* work to make their set look like that of NBC’s *The Brokaw Report*? Or are the producers of Tom Brokaw’s show trying to make it look more like *Extra!*?

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

It is one thing to understand the importance of being a media literate individual, of knowing its fundamental elements and necessary skills. It is quite another to live a media literate life. This is not as difficult as it may seem at first. For one thing, we live lives that are virtually awash in media and their messages, so the opportunities to practice media literacy are always there. But we can (and should) do more. We can live a media literate life *and* make media literacy a living enterprise. We can encourage and even teach others its value.

The margins of this text are replete with URLs that connect us to educational, professional, scholarly, public interest, governmental, and industry groups that, either directly or indirectly, contribute to our ability to be media literate. This chapter alone offers links to a dozen sites specifically devoted to advancing the cause of media literacy. In addition, a majority of states maintain standards for teaching media literacy in their schools. Montana and Massachusetts are notable examples. Get a copy of the standards used where you live. Read them and, if need be, challenge them.

Look, too, at the media literacy efforts in other countries. Media literacy is a mandatory part of the school curriculum in Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. The Bertelsmann Foundation has long sponsored media education programs in Germany (and recently in the United States). The British Film Institute and CLEMI in France underwrite similar efforts in their respective countries. The Australian Teachers of Media encourage media education in Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia.

The American media industry, too, is committing itself to the effort. Many contemporary tele-vision programs, such as public broadcasting's adolescent reading show *Wishbone*, regularly close with a behind-the-scenes, how-did-we-produce-that-shot feature in an attempt to teach television "readers" the "grammar" of video narrative. The cable network Court TV runs a classroom-style program called *Choices and Consequences* designed to help students read the difference between negative and positive media images. Cable network Odyssey runs a public service campaign featuring "Spokesfrog" Kermit aimed at instructing parents how to pass media literacy skills on to their children. The Discovery Channel offers *Assignment: Media Literacy*, separate kits for elementary, middle, and high school students designed to impart critical viewing skills for all electronic media. The cable industry, in conjunction with the national PTA, sponsors an annual nationwide media literacy event called *Take Charge of Your TV Week*, typically in October. Almost every newspaper of any size in America now produces a weekly "young person's section" to encourage boys and girls to read the paper and differentiate it from the other news media. Even controversial in-school news/advertising network Channel One (Chapter 12) offers a media literacy course to schools free of charge.

Again, there is no shortage of ways to improve your own media literacy and to advance that of others. This text will help you get started. Each chapter ends with two sections. The first, *Developing Media Literacy Skills*, focuses on improving our personal media literacy. The second, *Living Media Literacy*, offers suggestions for using our media literacy skills in the larger culture—making media literacy a living enterprise.

The PBS young people's reading show *Wishbone* always closes with an explanation of how some part of the program was technically produced.

Strategies for Media Literacy

Figure 2.2 A Model of Media Literacy. This model graphically represents some of the themes investigated in this chapter. The entire media literacy enterprise has at its base *an understanding of the process of mass communication*. Upon this rests its second most fundamental set of elements, *an understanding of media content as a text that provides insight into our culture and lives*, and *an awareness of media's impact*. Once media

message consumers acquire these three elements, the remainder should logically follow. Individuals may alter the relative position of the remaining foundational elements and building blocks to suit their personally determined consumption strategies.

www.

swamp.org/mediasites.html

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

Chapter Review

In oral or preliterate cultures language was local and specific; knowledge, history, and myth were transmitted orally; memory was crucial; and elders and storytellers, as repositories of cultural values and beliefs, occupied positions of elevated status.

Writing changed the way cultures are organized and the way they function. Meaning and language became more uniform. When knowledge, history, and myth were transmitted in writing, the literate became the new elite. With writing also came the beginnings of democracy.

Gutenberg's invention of the printing press around 1446 gave writing new power. The ability to read became a necessity for people at all levels of society; literacy and education spread. The newly literate began to interact, both as people and in their ideas. As more material was published, people had more variety of thought presented to them, and they were freer to read what they wanted when they wanted.

The Industrial Revolution spread the power of print, but it also helped create a middle class with discretionary income to spend on information and entertainment. By the end of the 19th century a mass audience and the means to reach it existed.

The communication technologies that followed the printing press—newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, radio, television, and computer networks—had their own impacts. Mass market newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, and radio helped to geographically and culturally unify the rapidly expanding, pluralistic, multiethnic United States; aided in the creation and nourishment of its middle class; and helped establish, support, and solidify the roots of our consumer economy.

Television was central to the transformation of the United States into a true consumer economy after World War II. But the influence and power of all the mass media, as well as the new computer communication technologies, raise questions about their use and control. People who are more media literate can better answer these questions for themselves and their culture.

Media literacy is composed of an awareness of the impact of the media on individuals and society; an understanding of the process of mass communication; strategies for analyzing and discussing media messages; an awareness of media content as a “text” that provides insight into contemporary culture; cultivation of enhanced enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation of media content; development of an understanding of the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners; and development of appropriate and effective production skills.

Media literacy requires mastery of several skills: the ability and willingness to make an effort to understand content, to pay attention, and to filter out noise; an understanding of and respect for the power of media messages; the ability to distinguish emotional from reasoned reactions when responding to content and to act accordingly; development of heightened expectations of media content; a knowledge of genre conventions and the ability to recognize when conventions are being mixed; the ability to think critically about media messages, no matter how credible their source; and a knowledge of the internal language of various media and the ability to understand its effects, no matter how complex.

Key Terms

Use the text's CD-ROM and the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/baran to further your understanding of the following terminology.

literate culture, 38

oral (or preliterate) culture, 39

griots, 39

ideogrammatic alphabet, 39

syllable alphabet, 40

papyrus, 40

parchment, 40

literacy, 40

information society, 48

media literacy, 50

multiple points of access, 53

third person effect, 56

genre, 57

conventions, 57

production values, 58

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture

Questions for Review

Go to the self-quizzes on the CD-ROM and the Online Learning Center to test your knowledge.

1. Characterize the communication and organizational styles of preliterate cultures. Where does power reside in these cultures?
2. What social, cultural, and economic factors boosted the development and spread of writing?
3. How did literacy change communication and the organization of preliterate cultures? Characterize the newly literate cultures.
4. How did the printing press make possible mass communication?
5. What was the impact of printing on the culture of Western Europe?
6. What was the role of the Industrial Revolution in furthering literacy? The development of the middle class? Democracy?
7. What is media literacy? What are its components?
8. What is meant by multiple points of access? What does it have to do with media literacy?
9. What are some specific media literacy skills?
10. What is the difference between genres and production conventions? What do these have to do with media literacy?

Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion

1. Consider the changes brought about by the shift from oral to literate cultures. How similar or different do you think the changes will be as we move to a more fully computer literate culture?
2. The Gutenberg printing press had just the opposite effect from what was intended. What optimistic predictions for the cultural impact of the Internet and the World Wide Web do you think will prove as inaccurate as Gutenberg's hopes for his innovation? What optimistic predictions do you think will be realized? Defend your answers.
3. How media literate do you think you are? What about those around you—your parents, for example, or your best friend? What are your weaknesses as a media literate person?
4. Can you take a piece of media content from your own experience and explain how you approach it from multiple points of access?
5. How do you choose which television programs you watch? How thoughtful are your choices? How do you choose videos? Movies? How thoughtful are you in these circumstances?

Important Resources

Davis, R. E. (1976). *Response to innovation: A study of popular argument about new mass media.* New York: Arno Press. A fascinating examination of popular press reaction to the introduction of movies, talkies, radio, and television. Thousands of quotes are used to demonstrate that concern greeting these technologies varied very little.

Eisenstein, E. L. (1979). *The printing press as an agent of change: Communications and cultural transformations in early-modern Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The classic work on the impact of printing. Even though it is serious scholarship, it is a readable look at and analysis of Gutenberg's technology and its cultural impact.

Innis, H. A. (1972). *Empire and communications.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. A classic work examining how the spread of communication facilitated the spread of political and military influence. It is serious scholarship but well written and accessible to college-level readers.

Potter, W. J. (1998). *Media literacy.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. A detailed and thorough discussion of media literacy—what it is, how to develop it, and how to teach it.

Silverblatt, A. (1995). *Media literacy.* Westport, CN: Praeger. Portions of Chapter 2 in this book depend heavily on the ideas expressed clearly and intelligently by Silverblatt in this excellent primer. Together with the Potter book mentioned above, these are two of the best sources on media literacy available anywhere.

Silverblatt, A., & Enright Eliceiri, E. M. (1997). *Dictionary of media literacy.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. A reference book containing concepts, terms, organizations, and issues important to media literacy.

Silverblatt, A., Ferry, J., & Finan, B. (1999). *Approaches to media literacy: A handbook.* Armonk, NY: Sharp. A how-to book for building strong media literacy skills across all media, including public relations and advertising.

PART 1 Laying the Groundwork

More on Storytelling

Project Gutenberg

More on the Industrial Revolution

Center for Media Literacy

Center for Media Education

Media Awareness Network

Media Education Foundation

Alliance for a Media Literate America

Media Education

Association for Media Literacy

Paper Tiger TV

Media Alliance

Strategies for Media Literacy

www.storynet.org

www.promo.net/pg/

www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook14.html

www.medialit.org

www.cme.org/cme

www.schoolnet.ca/medianet

www.igc.org/mef

www.nmec.org/medialit.html

www.mediaeducation.com

www.aml.ca

www.papertiger.org

www.media-alliance.org

www.swamp.org/mediasites.html

CHAPTER 2 Media Literacy and Culture >