

What is 'computer literacy'?

"Computer literacy is an essential outcome of contemporary education. Each student should acquire an understanding of the versatility and limitations of the computer through first-hand experience in a variety of fields." So stated the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

"Computer literacy, like virtue, means different things to different people." That's the word from Robert E. Golden, director of personal computing at Rochester Institute of Technology. At Golden's school, computer literacy means the ability to program, the ability to use specific applications such as word processing and the acquisition of general knowledge about computers.

THERE ARE many definitions of computer literacy, but generally they include the following characteristics:

- Removal of fear, anxiety or intimidation from computer usage.
- Knowledge of what a computer can and cannot do, its capabilities and limitations.
- Recognition that the computer gets instruction from a program written by a person.
- Ability to communicate with a computer.
- Understanding of the variety of ways computers are being used.
- Awareness of the number of opportunities in computer-related occupations.

Crucial in all computer literacy training is the requirement for "hands-on" experience.

COMPUTER LITERACY will soon be taught as a subject throughout the educational system.

Components of computer literacy already exist in most elementary and

secondary schools, preschools and many colleges and universities. Harvard now requires graduates to demonstrate the ability to write a simple computer program.

Other colleges require a specific level of computer literacy for admission. At several engineering and technical colleges, students are required to own a personal computer and show competency.

The demand for computer literacy in technical and business professions is expected. Most persons employed or in training for these occupations embrace computer education.

Computer literacy for non-technical fields and for the general population is less enthusiastically supported. However, the needs and benefits to our society cannot be underestimated, both in the short and long runs.

WHATEVER METHOD is used to obtain computer literacy, the following major topics should be considered in any program.

1. Computer history — Knowledge of historical high points in computer development. Computer facts should be studied along with the time line of other technological advancements and special occasions.
2. Computer systems — The individual should know the major components of a computer system. One should know the difference between hardware and software, and be able to explain the function of each component and give examples of each.
3. Problem solving — The student should be able to apply the five-step approach to problem solving; understand the problem, plan a strategy for solving the problem, code that strategy



high tech
Ronald R. Watcke

into some language, test the program, prepare the program and possible solution for use by others (documentation).

4. Limitations of the computer — Develop an awareness that the computer is only as good as the programs that go into it. Understand that the computer is a tool to be used, not the solution.

5. Applications in society — Each student should be made aware that there is hardly any occupation not affected by a computer. Students should investigate the effect computers have on personal life, now and in the future.

The effect the computer will have upon future career choices is another topic not to be overlooked.

6. Possible threats — The student should also be presented the concept of computer crime. What types of computer crime exist now? How can they occur? How do they affect the individual?

What can be done to control it? Also, the student should know what effect the computer will have on our national employment figures. Is a large personal information bank good? Are there any threats to privacy rights of the individual?

YOU CAN obtain computer literacy in a wide variety of ways.

You can take a course at a community college. You can enroll in a course in an adult education program at a local high school.

Several retail computer stores offer short courses which may be useful. Hopefully, you have resolved to become computer literate in 1984. If so, go to it — and good luck!

A Troy resident, Watcke is dean of liberal arts at Wayne County Community College.

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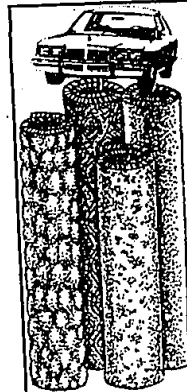
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