



The Foundation of Learning and Literacy's Touchstones¹

1. A fair and equitable society depends upon every citizen being able to speak, listen critically with confidence, read and write. Being literate gives people more equitable access to information, employment, enjoyment and further educational opportunities. Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity, its obligations to its First Nations peoples, and its ongoing migrant and refugee intakes place great demands on Australian schools to develop the language and literacy resources of its diverse young people. Australians living in poverty can face many challenges learning to be literate. Children and young people who are disadvantaged or at risk may have less access to factors that are important when learning to be literate including:

- parents and caregivers who can read and write
- homes with books filled with rich stories
- extended parent-child talk
- authentic opportunities to share in reading and writing for different purposes
- quality pre-school experiences.

2. Oral language is the foundation for all meaningful reading and writing. The importance of parents, caregivers and teachers enjoying and actively spending time: playing with children; engaging with sounds and words in rhymes and songs; sharing stories; listening carefully and responding to questions meaningfully; wondering together; and talking about shared experiences cannot be overstated.

3. Storytelling, reading, viewing and writing are pleasure and power. They allow us to actively participate in the real world, understand others' perspectives and to imagine and create alternative worlds. These purposes should be at the heart of teaching children and young people to tell stories, read and write. Teachers and parents can support learners to speak confidently, read and write in response to what is happening in their community and their wider world. Engagement and motivation improve when learning is relevant, rigorous and authentic and ideas and knowledge are connected across content areas. Engagement and motivation are essential for deep learning.

4. Creativity, the Arts and imagination matter in ongoing literacy learning. Children and young people are innately curious, imaginative and playful. They ask questions about why things are as they are. Parents, caregivers and teachers need to foster this inquiry, exploration, sense of wonder and deep questioning. Hearing and telling stories, sharing quality literature and imaginative story writing are critical for learners' ongoing creative language and literacy development. Drawing helps to symbolically represent or visualise thinking. Drama enables embodiment of feelings, events and ideas. Arts-rich language activities and experiences across all stages of schooling foster creative, critical and imaginative thinking, nurture empathy and compassion, develop self-confidence and efficacy and encourage a respect for diverse perspectives. These dispositions are part of becoming deeply literate.

5. Responding and making meaning is the beginning, middle and end of speaking and listening, learning to read and write. Literacy is about creating meaning and communicating. We read to make sense of and respond to what someone has written, and we write in ways that make sense to others. Young children understand this from the

¹ In 2020 the inaugural Foundation of Learning and Literacy created 11 Touchstones to underpin its work. These were revised in 2024 and a 12th Touchstone was added.

moment they put symbols on paper and ask adults to 'read' them. Literacy instruction must keep this fundamental purpose of reading and writing at the forefront at all times throughout all the years of schooling.

6. Learners' experiences are different, their environments are different, their ways of thinking are different. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to literacy learning does not work. Every learner is unique. Classroom teachers need to work skilfully and inclusively to identify where individual children and young people are in their literacy and language learning. They teach learners the skills and strategies they need in order to understand, construct, reconstruct, create and communicate meanings through oral language, reading and writing. They support them to extend their repertoire of strategies so that they apply these to texts of increasing complexity. The creative arts (dance, drama, literature, media arts, music and visual arts) are different ways of making meaning - different kinds of literacies - and all need to be embedded within the literacy program. Literacy development does not happen in a lock-step, linear sequence. All children are not the same and do not always follow the same developmental pathway.

7. Learners need multiple opportunities to engage in reading; the more time spent on independent, self-selected reading, the more their reading improves. Learners need time to read every day, with easy access to a wide variety of quality literature from which to choose. Independent, self-selected reading leads to a richer vocabulary, expanded spelling knowledge, and improved comprehension skills. Grammar skills, writing styles and standardised test results often improve when children have more time to read and discuss what they are reading. Similarly, learners become more accomplished writers by writing every day at every stage of schooling. Learners benefit from being part of a talking, reading and writing community across all learning areas.

8. The main purpose for literacy assessment is to inform responsive teaching and provide learners, their teachers, parents/caregivers and school systems with information that informs all stakeholders of progress and achievements. Authentic assessment that impacts positively on learning is an ongoing process, occurring before, during and after learning and teaching every day. It involves many different strategies to enable the learner to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. The most effective assessment strategies are negotiated with learners to ensure expectations are clear, are linked to instruction and provide insights for the learner and the teacher about what learning is next. Snapshot national assessments and annual standardised tests should not be overemphasised. In-class and diagnostic assessments also provide valuable information about learner progress.

9. Effective literacy teaching and learning need to continue beyond the early years as literacy learning and texts become more complex. Once learners are moving beyond early literacy, we need to sustain their early progress, enjoyment and excitement so that they engage with and respond to complex texts across all content areas. Ways of dealing with the complexities of language in these texts require continued modelling, discussion, explicit feedback and teacher-led inquiry, to enable students to infer layered meanings and build rich vocabularies and understandings in different discipline areas. Learners need to develop confidence to question and respond to assumptions made in some texts. All students need to master the specialised academic language of different Key Learning Areas.

10. Teachers teach children and young people. Programs don't. Teachers make the difference in learning at school and need to work in partnership with parents. Good programming relies on teacher expertise to ensure they meet the needs, interests and experiences of individual learners.

11. Ongoing teacher professional learning is critical. Like all professions, teachers must continue to learn about new developments in their fields. They must draw on contemporary, valid, rigorously-conducted and school-tested research to inform their judgements to target their teaching to support all learners in their care. At all levels of the system (school, network, region, state and national) teachers need ongoing, embedded professional learning that continues to build their expertise and capability, particularly in literacy.

12. When parents and carers enjoy talking with and reading to and with their children, everyone benefits. Language and literacy skills established during early childhood are critical for later school success. Parents and caregivers are an important part of their child's learning in those early years. The best foundation for children who start school speaking a language other than English is to develop literacy in that language and build on the special learning resources they bring to school, including their storytelling, home literacy practices and other cultural knowledge and experiences. Parents need to maintain their interest in their children's reading and writing all through their school years. Learning to read and write is an ongoing process that doesn't end when home reading books stop coming home. Parents need to continue talking with their children and young adults about what they are reading and writing at school.