



## GEMS Winchester School Dubai



# Literacy Policy (Whole School)

**Person(s) Responsible:** Vice Principal & Assistant Head Teacher

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## 1. Vision

*Teachers in a (secondary) school need to understand that literacy is a key issue regardless of the subject taught. It is an important element of their effectiveness as a subject teacher  
(Department for Education 2012)*

At GEMS Winchester School Dubai (WSD), we believe that literacy is a key factor in effective teaching of all subjects and is essential to the improvement of learning and student development. Literacy is an integral part of all good teaching. All teachers are teachers of literacy and therefore have a responsibility to develop students' competence in reading, writing and speaking & listening in their subjects to ensure that students can access curriculum content and reach their full potential. This policy will develop a shared understanding between all staff of how Literacy can be promoted across the curriculum.

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## 2. Definition

Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that allows students to communicate effectively and make sense of the world around them.

It encompasses a range of skills including comprehension, critical thinking, problem solving and the ability to analyse and interpret various forms of information, fostering lifelong learning and active participation in society. Our goal is to develop these skills across all subjects and grade levels.

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## 3. Aims & Objectives

The aims & objectives of this policy are:

- To ensure students have the reading, writing and speaking & listening skills needed to access the school curriculum
- To promote a consistent approach to literacy across the school
- To promote a love of reading and writing across the school
- To develop students' abilities to communicate effectively
- To enhance critical thinking and comprehension skills across all subjects

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## 4. Literacy in the Early Years

Through our Early Years provision, the aim to develop literacy through the following ways.

### Prioritise the development of communication and language

Language provides the foundation of thinking and learning and high-quality child and adult interactions are important. This includes talking with the children instead of just talking to them. Adults have a vital role to play in modelling effective language in communication. A wide range of approaches should be used including shared reading, storytelling and strategies that specifically extend children's vocabulary across curriculum areas.

### Develop early reading using a balanced approach

Approaches include storytelling, activities to develop letter and sound knowledge and singing and rhyming activities to further develop student's phonological awareness.

### Developing the student's capability and motivation to write

Writing is physically and intellectually demanding at this age, drawing on elements of transcription, composition and executive function. Expressive language underpins writing and should be prioritised. A wide range of opportunities to communicate through writing helps to develop student's motivation to write, developing the foundations of a more traditional handwriting style. This is important because an increased

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## 5. Development of Literacy beyond the Early Years

Literacy instruction will be integrated across all subjects, ensuring students become proficient in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Our approach includes adaptive teaching, diverse texts, and evidence-based strategies to enhance comprehension, critical thinking, and communication skills. Subject Heads of Department will support teachers, encourage good practices, and facilitate cross-curricular literacy skills.

Each half-term, teachers will meet to discuss literacy implementation and examine each other's marking per the school policy. The English Heads of Department will also share reading and writing assessment data with all teachers to keep them informed of each student's reading and writing ability.

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## 6. Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary instruction is not just the domain of the English teacher; words matter in every subject across the curriculum. A strong understanding of both Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary and context-specific definitions, helps students to construct better responses to questions and essays, better understand newly taught content and communicate like experts in any given discipline.

To ensure that every student in the classroom has the vocabulary knowledge they need to thrive, both when learning new content and when tackling challenging questions, subject-specific vocabulary must be explicitly taught in every discipline. Only when subject-specific vocabulary instruction unlocks a students' ability to approach a discipline like an expert (e.g. approach science like a Scientist), do they feel they have the potential to succeed and are barriers removed.

### How to teach subject specific vocabulary

The process of exposing learners to new terminology through high-quality encounters can be broken down into six steps:

1. **Explain:** the definitions of new vocabulary should be explained in language the students are familiar with. Context should be provided through sentences and examples from real-life scenarios, if applicable.
2. **Reinstate:** in pairs, encourage students to explain to each other what the new vocabulary means in their own words and create their own example. Teacher to move around the room and listen to the definitions students are giving, to identify misconceptions and to up-level responses.
3. **Show:** Ask students to draw a symbol, picture, graphic or knowledge organiser displaying the concept they have learned. This allows the teacher to address any misunderstanding and allows students another high-quality encounter with the word(s).
4. **Discuss:** Facilitate a structured conversation to discuss the new word, such as prompting students to think of synonyms and antonyms, or modelling examples of how to use the word in conversation. This allows students to improve their oracy.
5. **Refine and Reflect:** Ask students to return to the first definition they wrote. Is there anything they want to change or add? This encourages students to correct their own misconceptions independently, boosting their confidence when encountering unknown vocabulary in the future.
6. **Play:** Play is a powerful method for embedding new knowledge. Vocabulary games such as Charades, Taboo, Bullseye etc. can help students think intuitively about new vocabulary. These games also allow students to connect new terminology to prior knowledge, developing their overall understanding of high-level vocabulary concepts.

By integrating these steps and strategies, teachers can effectively teach subject-specific vocabulary, helping students build a strong foundation in the language of the discipline.

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## 7. Reading Across the Curriculum

Disciplinary literacy involves specific reading skills and practices necessary for understanding and engaging with texts in different academic subjects. At GEMS Winchester School Dubai (WSD), we recognise the importance of teaching reading skills across the curriculum to ensure students can effectively comprehend and analyse discipline-specific content. The following strategies outline how we aim to teach disciplinary literacy, with a focus on reading, to enhance students' academic success and to foster a deeper understanding of each subject:

- 1. Understand discipline specific literacy needs:** teachers to identify the unique literacy demands of each subject, such as the structure of scientific texts, the analysis required of historical documents, or the problem-solving approach in mathematical reading.
- 2. Select appropriate texts:** teachers choose texts that are representative of the subject, including short passages and texts, primary sources, journal articles, technical manuals and content-specific books.
- 3. Teach text structures:** teachers should help students to recognise and understand the common structures of texts in different subjects, such as hypothesis in Science, cause and effect in History, and proofs in Mathematics.
- 4. Implement reading strategies:** teach general and specific reading strategies, such as skimming for main ideas, annotating for comprehension, and summarising key points. Strategies should align with the subjects reading practices.
- 5. Model reading practices:** Model how to approach and analyse texts within a subject. Show students how experts in the field read and interpret texts.
- 6. Encourage critical thinking:** Promote questioning and critical analysis of texts. Encourage students to evaluate sources, analyse arguments, and consider different perspectives within the subject.
- 7. Provide guided practice:** Offer structured opportunities for students to practice reading subject-specific texts with support and feedback.
- 8. Assess understanding:** Use formative and summative assessment to gauge students' reading comprehension and ability to apply their reading skills within the subject. Provide feedback to guide improvement.

By implementing these strategies, WSD aims to create a cohesive and effective approach to teaching reading across the curriculum and within individual subjects. This not only enhances students' academic success but also deepens their understanding and engagement with each subject, fostering lifelong learners who are adept at analysing and interpreting information within any academic subject.

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## 8. Writing Across the Curriculum

By focusing on writing across the curriculum, students are equipped with the specialised writing skills needed for different academic subjects. Teaching students to write effectively in each subject enhances their understanding and engagement, preparing them for academic and professional success. Integrating writing across the curriculum fosters critical thinking, deeper learning, and a comprehensive understanding of each subject. The following strategies outline how to teach disciplinary literacy through writing in various subjects:

- 1. Identify subject-specific writing styles:** teach students the distinct writing styles and conventions used in different subjects, such as lab reports in Science.
- 2. Integrate writing assignments into all subjects:** Incorporate writing tasks that reflect the types of writing professionals do in each subject. For example, students write technical explanations in Science and historical analysis in history lessons.
- 3. Teach the writing process:** emphasise the stages of the writing process: planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Provide guidelines and tools specific to each subject to help students refine their work.
- 4. Develop critical thinking:** design assignments that require students to analyse, synthesise and evaluate information. For example, a History teacher might assign a comparative analysis of historical events.
- 5. Provide models and exemplars:** show students examples of high-quality writing in each subject. Analyse these texts to identify key features and techniques that students should emulate.
- 6. Provide continuous feedback and support:** Offer regular, constructive feedback on students' writing. Use rubrics that highlight discipline-specific criteria to guide students in improving their work.

### Example Activities

- **Science:** Have students write lab reports that include hypotheses, methodologies, results, and conclusions.
- **History:** Assign research papers that require analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- **Mathematics:** Ask students to write explanations of their problem-solving processes and mathematical reasoning.
- **English/Literature:** Encourage students to write literary analyses that explore themes, character development, and stylistic devices.

By implementing these strategies, WSD aims to create a cohesive and effective approach to teaching writing across the curriculum and within individual subjects. This is essential for equipping students with specialised writing skills, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively and engage deeply with diverse subjects and preparing them for academic success and future professional challenges which require strong communication and analytical abilities.

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## 9. Speaking & Listening Across the Curriculum

Beyond reading and writing, proficiency in speaking and listening is equally essential as it facilitates deeper understanding, critical thinking, and collaboration. At WSD, we emphasise the development of these skills within all subjects to ensure students can articulate their ideas clearly, engage in meaningful discussions, and comprehend complex concepts through active listening. By integrating speaking and listening practices in various contexts—whole-class discussions, small groups, pairs, and individual contributions—teachers play a pivotal role in fostering a language-rich environment where standard English is consistently modelled, and students are encouraged to articulate thoughts thoughtfully and respectfully.

The following strategies outline how to teach speaking and listening in various subjects:

1. **Structured Discussions:** Implement structured discussions such as Socratic seminars or fishbowl discussions where students engage in focused dialogue around key concepts or texts, fostering deeper understanding and critical thinking.
2. **Role-Playing and Simulations:** Use role-playing activities or simulations related to subject content to encourage students to apply their knowledge and practice effective communication skills in realistic scenarios.
3. **Debate and Argumentation:** Organise debates or argumentative discussions where students defend viewpoints using evidence and reasoning specific to the subject area, promoting persuasive speaking and active listening.
4. **Oral Presentations:** Incorporate opportunities for students to deliver oral presentations on topics relevant to the subject content, emphasising clear communication, organisation of ideas, and effective presentation skills.
5. **Peer Feedback and Reflection:** Facilitate peer feedback sessions following discussions or presentations, encouraging students to provide constructive criticism and reflect on their own speaking and listening skills to promote continuous improvement.
6. **Integration of Multimedia:** Integrate multimedia presentations, podcasts, or digital storytelling projects where students use spoken language to convey information and ideas, leveraging technology to enhance engagement and communication skills.

By implementing these strategies, WSD aims to empower students to express themselves clearly, engage in meaningful discourse, and grasp complex concepts through active listening. By using the above strategies effectively, teachers cultivate an environment where students learn to communicate effectively and respectfully. This commitment enhances academic achievement and prepares students for lifelong learning and collaboration in an interconnected world.

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