You said:

How has digital literacy changed over the last year because of artificial intelligence?

ChatGPT said:

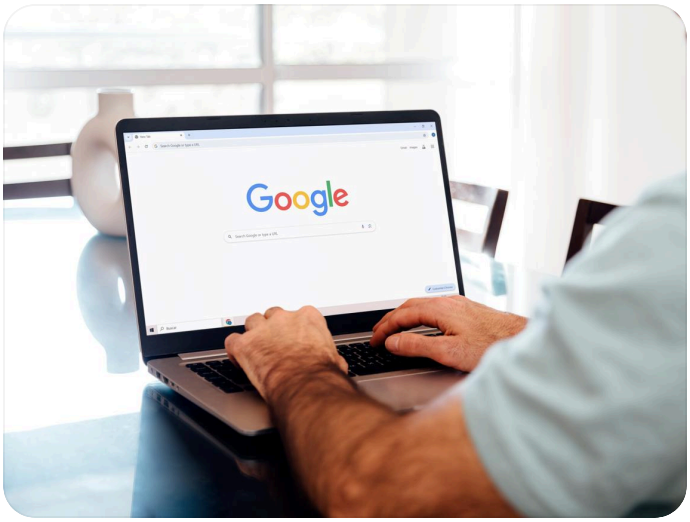
How AI has changed digital literacy over the last year

Over the past year, digital literacy has been shifting from knowing how to use digital tools to understanding, questioning, and working responsibly with artificial intelligence.

As of November 2026, one of the biggest changes is that **being digitally literate increasingly means knowing how to evaluate AI-generated information, not simply knowing how to find information online.** AI can generate convincing text, images, audio, video, and computer code, making it harder to distinguish reliable information from inaccurate or fabricated content. UNESCO identifies critical thinking, authenticity, privacy, bias, and transparency as central challenges for digital and media literacy in the age of AI. UNESCO +1

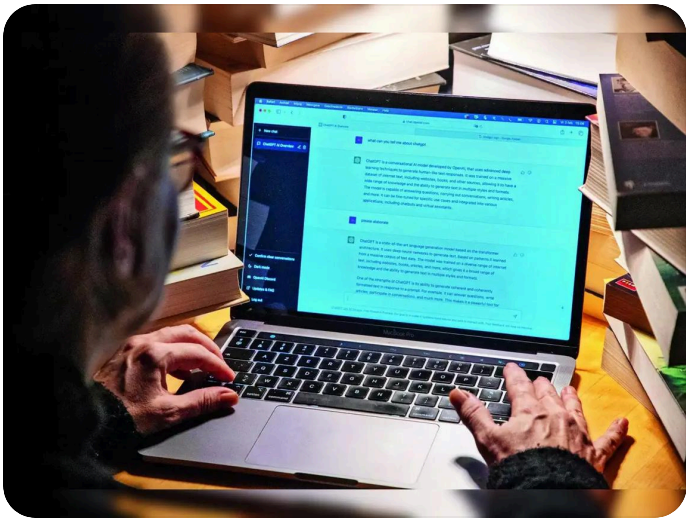
Here are six important ways digital literacy has changed.

1. From searching for information to evaluating AI answers



Before

Search for information, compare websites, and decide which sources to trust.



Now

Ask AI a question, evaluate its answer, verify its claims, and check its sources.

AI can produce fluent, confident answers that contain factual errors or invented references. Consequently, digital literacy now requires people to ask:

- Is this information accurate?
- Can I verify it through an independent, credible source?
- Does the cited source actually support the claim?
- Is important context missing?

The shift is from simply *finding information* to **verifying information**, even when the answer initially sounds convincing. UNESCO +1

2. AI literacy has become part of digital literacy

People increasingly need to understand not just how to operate AI tools, but also how those tools work and where their limitations lie.

That includes understanding:

- **Generative AI:** How AI creates text, images, audio, and other content.
- **Machine learning:** How systems learn patterns from data.
- **AI limitations:** Why a system can produce incorrect information, even when it sounds certain.
- **Bias:** How training data and system design can influence outputs.
- **Human judgment:** Why important decisions still require evaluation beyond an AI-generated answer.

The OECD and European Commission published an AI literacy framework on June 18, 2026, emphasizing the ability to understand AI, critically evaluate its outputs, and use it ethically and creatively. OECD

This is an important distinction: **using AI successfully is not the same as understanding AI.**

3. Understanding images, videos, and other synthetic media

Digital literacy used to emphasize recognizing misleading headlines, edited photographs, and questionable websites. AI has expanded the challenge: convincing fake content can now be created from scratch.

People need to become more aware of:

- AI-generated photographs and realistic videos.
- Cloned voices and fabricated audio recordings.

- Fake quotations, news stories, and social media accounts.
- Images or videos presented without their original context.
- The limits of automated AI-content detectors.

The important change is that **seeing or hearing something is no longer enough to establish that it is authentic.** People need to examine provenance, seek corroboration, and consider who published the material and why. UNESCO

4. Learning how to work *with* AI rather than simply use it

Digital literacy increasingly includes the ability to give AI useful instructions, assess its response, refine the result, and contribute one's own knowledge.

For example, a digitally literate person might ask AI to explain a difficult concept, request an alternative explanation, challenge an unsupported claim, and then explain the concept independently.

This is different from asking AI to complete a task and accepting the answer without review.

Recent research illustrates the shift. The National Literacy Trust's 2026 UK study surveyed 40,543 young people aged 13–18. Compared with 2025, more reported checking AI outputs, incorporating their own ideas, and using AI to improve their writing. National Lite… +1

5. Critical thinking and independent learning matter more than ever

AI makes it easier to produce a polished result without necessarily understanding the subject.

That creates a new challenge for education and workplace training: distinguishing between someone who can produce an answer with AI and someone who genuinely understands the material.

The OECD's *Digital Education Outlook 2026*, published January 19, 2026, warns that AI can improve task performance without necessarily producing learning gains when it replaces the learner's own thinking. It also identifies opportunities for AI to support learning when used with clear educational goals. OECD

A useful way to think about this is:

AI as a learning partner

Ask for explanations, practice questions, feedback, alternative perspectives, and help identifying mistakes.

AI as a substitute for thinking

Accept answers without checking them, submit work you cannot explain, or rely on AI to make every decision.

6. Privacy, ethics, and responsible AI use are now essential skills

Being digitally literate increasingly means understanding the consequences of sharing information with AI systems and using their outputs.

This includes knowing how to:

- Protect personal, confidential, and sensitive information.
- Recognize potential bias in AI-generated responses.
- Respect copyright and intellectual property.
- Disclose AI assistance when appropriate.
- Consider how AI may affect other people and communities.
- Recognize that automated decisions can have real-world consequences.

These skills extend digital literacy beyond technical competence into ethical judgment and responsible participation in a society increasingly shaped by AI. OECD +1

What changed measurably from 2025 to 2026?

The National Literacy Trust's research offers a useful snapshot of the change among young people in the UK.

Young people aged 13–18 · UK survey results

Used generative AI	Checked AI outputs
66.5% → 79.0%	**42.8% → 52.3%**
2025 to 2026	Checking for possible errors
Added their own ideas	Simply copied AI for homework
48.9% → 56.5%	**25.1% → 24.1%**
Contributing their own thinking	A persistent concern

Source: National Literacy Trust, 2025 and 2026 surveys. These are self-reported UK findings, not estimates for all adults or the United States. National Literac… +1

The figures suggest two developments happening simultaneously: AI is becoming more widely used, and some users are becoming more thoughtful about how they use it. However, uncritical copying remains a concern.

The bottom line

Digital literacy has not become less important because of AI. **It has become more demanding.**

A digitally literate person in 2026 needs to be able to:

1. Find information using traditional digital tools and AI.
2. Evaluate the accuracy, credibility, and authenticity of that information.
3. Understand AI's basic capabilities, limitations, and biases.
4. Use AI effectively without surrendering independent thinking.
5. Protect privacy and make responsible ethical decisions.
6. Continue developing reading, writing, communication, and reasoning skills.

The central principle is this: **AI can help you produce information, but digital literacy helps you decide whether that information deserves to be trusted.**

For further reading, two useful sources are the OECD's AI Literacy Framework ↗ and UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy in the Age of AI ↗.