FOOD LITERACY PROGRESSION:
A Framework of Food Literacy Development for Children and Youth from 2-18 Years
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What Is Food Literacy?

Food literacy is a broad concept encompassing a spectrum of both tacit and procedural knowledge, skills and attitudes about food. As a form of literacy, it is the outcome of educational goals intended to inform and develop personal skills, and contribute to personal and community empowerment and social change. Food literacy increases food self-determination, and enhances health and well-being.

Why Do We Need Food Literacy?

We live in an incredibly complex foodscape. The widespread availability and marketing of highly processed foods in most countries has armed food skills and knowledge, negatively impacting population health and well-being. These trends are further impacted through often erroneous or misleading food and nutrition information on social media and other platforms. We are also increasingly aware of the impact of food production and consumption on the Earth’s sustainability. Consequently, the ability for people to maintain health and well-being of themselves and the planet, through food and nutrition, has paradoxically become more difficult. This is especially concerning for children and youth as they develop to become tomorrow’s adults.

What Is the Food Literacy Progression?

The Progression provides an organizational framework for food literacy development from ages 2-18 years. The Progression is a tool that can be used to support food education by demonstrating the importance and range of food-related capabilities in human development, and the progression of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to become food literate.

How Was the Food Literacy Progression Developed?

The Food Literacy Progression expands on the Critical Food Literacy Competencies for Youth framework developed at the University of Manitoba. Benchmarks are organized under three broad categories: Functional, Relational and Systems Competencies. The benchmarks were developed using principles and processes for social and emotional learning competencies, and through a review of the literature, including core competencies for children and young people aged 5-16 years. A framework of skills and knowledge around food, diet and physical activity. The Progression was assembled and reviewed by a team of Canadian home economics teachers, dietitians and nutritionists, as well as experts from the British Nutrition Foundation, and Deakin University School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences.

RELATIONAL COMPETENCIES

Joy and Meaning Through Food

EATING & COOKING WITH OTHERS:

- Use food to promote social well-being and solidarity

SYSTEMS COMPETENCIES

Equity and Sustainability for Food Systems

- Understand food security issues at individual, community and global levels

- Discover scope of careers in food production and nutrition

- Be aware of social justice implications of food production and choices

FOOD LITERACY PROGRESSION COMPETENCIES

NUTRITION:

- Understand the link between food and health at different ages and developmental stages
- Find reliable food and nutrition information

BEING AN INFORMED CONSUMER:

- Critically appraise food industry interests and marketing strategies
- Critically evaluate food and nutrition messaging on social media platforms

FOOD SKILLS:

- Plan and prepare a range of dishes and meals using appropriate kitchen tools and equipment

FOOD ORIGINS:

- Understand where and how food is produced

FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES

Confidence and Empowerment with Food*

- Food refers to food and beverages

FOOD SAFETY & HYGIENE:

- Use safe food handling practices when preparing, cooking and storing food
- Practice effective personal hygiene
- Follow safe kitchen and equipment use procedures

OBTAINING FOOD:

- Navigate food environments for health, convenience and economy

-positive relationships with food:

- Be present and attentive to food and eating
- Choose food that promotes well-being and self-determination
- Have a positive body image of self and others
- Understand that food is more than nutrients

FOOD & CULTURE:

- Enjoy food traditions, celebrations, cultural food and family recipes
- Understand cultural influences on food and eating
- Appreciate food and ways of eating from diverse cultures

FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY:

- Be aware of the relationship between food and environmental sustainability
- Reduce food waste


Food refers to food and beverages


- Mayer, 2015. Food literacy: The right to quality food education. The right to quality food education. The right to quality food education. The right to quality food education. The right to quality food education. The right to quality food education. The right to quality food education. The right to quality food education. The right to quality food education.


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Practice effective personal hygiene

FOOD SAFETY & HYGIENE
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Practice effective personal hygiene
Follow safe kitchen and equipment use procedures

NUTRITION
Understand the link between food and health at different ages and developmental stages
Find reliable food and nutrition information

FOOD ORIGINS
Understand where and how food is produced

FOOD ORIGINS
Recognize that all food comes from plants or animals
Recognize that we can grow/care for some of our own food

AGES 2-4
- Recognize that food and water are essential for life
- Recognize that a balanced and varied diet is needed to grow, be active and be healthy
- Recognize that some packaged foods have added non-food ingredients (e.g., preservatives)
- Identify processing vs. whole foods in e.g., whole fruit vs. juice
- Recognize that food can be fresh, frozen, dried or canned
- Recognize that it is important to eat meals regularly
- Recognize that some people eat or avoid certain foods for different reasons (e.g., allergy, intolerance, religion, preference)
- Recognize appropriate portion sizes of snacks and meals
- Choose to drink mainly water when thirsty

AGES 5-7
- Recognize that hunger and thirst
- Recognize that eating food is important for growth and health
- Recognize vegetables and fruit as a good way to satisfy thirst
- Identify different foods (e.g., fruit, vegetables, meat, eggs)
- Recognize the importance of preparing and cooking food safely and hygienically (e.g., handwashing, cleaning up, keeping work surfaces clean)
- Demonstrate readiness to cook (e.g., tie back long hair, washhands, wear an apron)
- Recognize that all food (purchased or cooked) needs to be stored in different ways to keep it safe (e.g., fridge, freezer)
- Recognize nutrition claims on food labelling
- Recognize vegetables and fruit as good ways to satisfy thirst
- Recognize that eating food is a part of meals and snacks
- Choose to eat mostly foods with added ingredients (e.g., fruit, vegetables, meat, eggs)

AGES 8-11
- Recognize that food is produced, processed and packaged in different ways
- Differentiate foods that come from plants and animals
- Explain where and how a variety of foods/ingredients are grown, raised, caught and processed
- Explain the basic steps in food production, including local food products
- Explain where and how a variety of foods/ingredients are grown, raised, caught and processed
- Recognize that many foods contain additives (e.g., artificial flavourings, colours, preservatives)
- Grow basic food plants (e.g., herbs)
- Recognize seasonal foods

AGES 12-14
- Recognize that food is produced, processed and sold in different ways (e.g., conventional and organic farming, greenhouses, fishing, hunting, gathering, local markets)
- Explain different stages in food production and processing
- Explain where and how a variety of foods/ingredients are grown, raised, caught and processed
- Recognize that many foods contain additives that help preserve food but some can also be harmful
- Demonstrate knowledge of basic food preservation methods (e.g., storing in refrigerator, freezing, canning)

AGES 15-18
- Recognize changing nutrition requirements during adolescent growth
- Recognize the importance of consuming appropriate proportions of foods from all the food groups in dietary guidelines
- Explain that food is produced, processed and packaged in different ways
- Recognize that food preservation keeps food safe to eat
- Recognize that food can be processed
- Recognize that food can be purchased, grown at home or at school, or gathered/hunted from the land
- Recognize that different foods are sometimes produced in different seasons
- Recognize that food can be purchased, grown at home or at school, or gathered/hunted from the land
- Recognize that some foods must be cooked or stored in the refrigerator
- Recognize that foods are produced locally
- Describe some foods that are produced locally

FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES
Confidence and Empowerment with Food

FOOD LITERACY DEVELOPMENTAL BENCHMARKS FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH AGES 2-18

FOOD LITERACY PROGRESSION
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BEING AN INFORMED CONSUMER
Critically appraise food industry interests and marketing strategies
Critically evaluate food and nutrition messaging on social media platforms
Distinguish between food and nutrition facts and myths

FOOD SKILLS
Plan and prepare a range of dishes
Navigate food environments for health, convenience and economics

AGES 2-4
- Identify a variety of common foods
- Use basic tableware
- Recognize that food waste is not desirable

AGES 5-7
- Recognize and taste a range of familiar foods and ingredients
- Describe food textures, smells, flavour
- Name and use a range of basic tools safely
- Name and use a range of food preparation tools with supervision
- Help to prepare a range of healthy snacks, dishes and drinks safely
- Identify ways to avoid wasting food during preparation and cooking
- Distinguish between a dish (e.g., cake, soup, salad) and its ingredients (e.g., flour, noodles, lettuce)

AGES 8-11
- Explain factors influencing food choice
- Help with food shopping and cooking at home
- Recognize key information on food packaging
- Recognize that food can be acquired through online/digital platforms
- Identify main sections of a grocery store/supermarket (physical or online)

AGES 12-14
- Explain how advertising and product claims can influence food choice
- Recognize food marketing in everyday environments
- Understand emotional vs. rational decision-making and how the former is used in marketing

AGES 15-18
- Use several food preparation techniques and methods when cooking a variety of foods and recipes
- Demonstrate how to prepare and store snacks and dishes safely, using a variety of foods, recipes, and equipment
- Describe how to safely make use of leftovers
- Demonstrate how to serve food inside and outside the home
- Choose recipes that follow dietary guidelines
- Develop a repertoire of meals and snacks that can be confidently prepared and enjoyed

AGES 2-4
- Recognize that different settings may affect food choices
- Recognize that pre-packaged foods have labels which provide information to help make choices
- Explain different methods of obtaining food
- Popular techniques (e.g., grocery store, market, hunting, gathering, fishing)

AGES 5-7
- Appreciate food presented by parents/caregivers
- Describe strategies used by food companies to market food products (e.g., partnering with schools, health organizations, sports groups, charities)

AGES 8-11
- Explain the influence of food marketing, advertising, and promotion on their own food behaviour
- Evaluate food marketing in everyday environments
- Recognize that social media can present inaccurate nutrition information as ‘fact’
- Evaluate pros and cons of common dietary patterns (e.g., plant-based, omnivore, vegetarian)

AGES 12-14
- Explain how advertising and product claims can influence food choice
- Recognize that food can be acquired through online/digital platforms
- Identify main sections of a grocery store/supermarket (physical or online)
- Evaluate online/digital food platforms based on criteria such as nutrition, cost, environmental impact and marketing

AGES 15-18
- Evaluate pros and cons of common dietary patterns (e.g., vegetarian, local food, sustainability)
- Make informed choices when purchasing foods (including digital/online) to achieve a healthy, varied, and balanced diet

OBTAINING FOOD
Navigate food environments for health, convenience and economics

AGES 2-4
- Recognize that food is available at grocery stores, market, restaurants, and other retail places
- Recognize that food may be grown at home or on farms, hunted, gathered or fished

AGES 5-7
- Recognize that different settings may affect food choices
- Recognize that pre-packaged foods have labels which provide information to help make choices
- Explain different methods of obtaining food
- Popular techniques (e.g., grocery store, market, hunting, gathering, fishing)

AGES 8-11
- Recognize how food packages are designed to appeal to children
- Discuss differences between food marketing and forms of children’s entertainment

AGES 12-14
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Food literacy increases food self-determination.
# FOOD LITERACY PROGRESSION

## AGES 2-4

**POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOOD**
- Enjoy food and eating
- Enjoy helping with food preparation
- Identify who produces food
- Enjoy eating with family and others
- Help select ingredients and dishes for family meals
- Describe food etiquette

**FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**
- Recognize that the environment needs to be taken care of
- Discuss impacts of food waste
- Identify waste from personal eating habits

**SOCIAL JUSTICE**
- Recognize that food should be shared
- Describe barriers to accessing food in their community
- Identify ways that food-producing animals are raised
- Identify different jobs in food production

**EATING & COOKING WITH OTHERS**
- Enjoy eating with family and others
- Enjoy helping with family food preparation
- Practice food etiquette (acceptable behaviour while eating)

## AGES 5-7

**POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOOD**
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**FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**
- Recognize that the environment needs to be taken care of
- Discuss impacts of food waste
- Identify waste from personal eating habits

**SOCIAL JUSTICE**
- Recognize that some people cannot afford food
- Describe barriers to accessing food in their community
- Identify ways that food-producing animals are raised
- Identify different jobs in food production

**EATING & COOKING WITH OTHERS**
- Enjoy eating with family and others
- Enjoy helping with family food preparation
- Practice food etiquette (acceptable behaviour while eating)

## AGES 8-11

**POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOOD**
- Enjoy trying and eating new foods
- Identify foods that they like and dislike
- Choose preferred foods from those offered
- Choose preferred foods from those offered
- Eat sociably with others
- Help select ingredients and dishes for family meals
- Help plan and prepare meals for family
- Describe family foods/food traditions
- Describe family foods/food traditions
- Value eating together with friends and family
- Take a lead role in preparing basic meals for friends and family

**FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**
- Recognize that there can be reasons we eat (besides hunger e.g., social, emotional, rewarding behaviour)
- Recognize that healthy eating should focus on foods, not nutrients
- Recognize that restrictive eating (e.g., eliminating an entire food group) can be harmful
- Identify barriers to accessing food in their community
- Identify ways that food-producing animals are raised
- Identify different jobs in food production

**SOCIAL JUSTICE**
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REFERENCES

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