

Synthetic Media Literacy

Category: Artificial Intelligence in Education

Synthetic media literacy is the capacity to understand, interpret, create and evaluate media generated or substantially altered by computational systems. It includes text, images, audio, video and virtual identities, encompassing beneficial creative, educational or accessible uses as well as deception, impersonation and manipulation.

Literacy requires more than spotting visual defects. As generation improves, judgement should combine contextual inquiry, source investigation, corroboration and available provenance information. A technically authentic file may still convey a false claim, while synthetic content may be legitimate when transparently produced ([Roe et al., 2024](#)).

Core Capabilities

1. **Recognise:** Identify common forms, purposes and production methods without assuming all synthetic media are deceptive.
2. **Investigate:** Trace the uploader, original context, date and supporting evidence using lateral searches.
3. **Inspect provenance:** Use metadata or content credentials where available, while understanding their limitations.
4. **Interpret:** Examine framing, emotional cues, omissions and the interests served by circulation.
5. **Create responsibly:** Respect consent, copyright, privacy and disclosure when producing or sharing synthetic media.

Examples in Practice

Before using an AI-generated historical image in a seminar, a student labels it as synthetic, identifies the sources that informed the prompt and explains which details are speculative. Classmates compare it with archival material rather than treating the image as documentary evidence.

Why It Matters

Synthetic media can widen expression and accessibility, but it also complicates evidence, authorship and consent. Literacy supports informed participation without encouraging blanket distrust: claims are evaluated through source, context and corroboration rather than appearance, technical novelty or immediate and potentially harmful emotional impact alone ([UNESCO, 2021](#)).

Further Reading

6. Roe, J., Perkins, M., & Furze, L. (2024). [Deepfakes and higher education: A research agenda and scoping review of synthetic media](#). Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 21(10).
7. UNESCO. (2021). [Media and information literate citizens: Think critically, click wisely!](#) UNESCO.
8. Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity. (2025). [C2PA technical specification, version 2.1](#). C2PA.

Related Terms: Deepfake Literacy | Media and Information Literacy | AI Source Verification | Digital Citizenship