

# Can you read this? Consider yourself lucky.

By [S. Dollard](#) - Sep 8, 2015

*Schoolchildren studying in Niger. (UNESCO/Flickr)*

Can you imagine not knowing how to use a computer or smartphone? Or read an election ballot? Or make correct change when paying for groceries?

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One of every five people in the world cannot read or write, and are unable to accomplish daily tasks like completing a job application, reading a label, or reading a nutritional label. The costs are enormous: \$1.2 trillion to the global economy, says the World Literacy Foundation.

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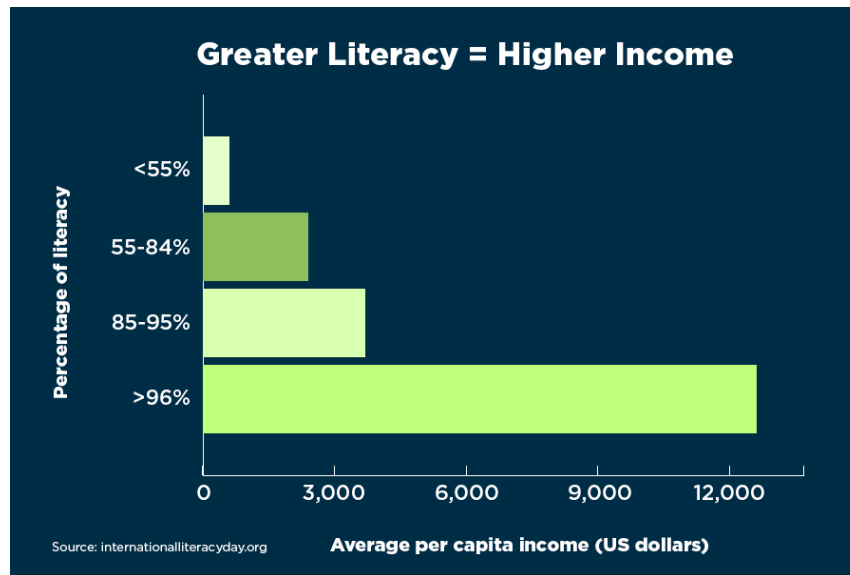
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The correlation between literacy and income: Higher levels of literacy significantly increase salary around the world. (State Dept.)

If you're illiterate, you are more likely to be poor, and to stay poor. You're also more likely to be unemployed, sick or in prison.

## Unemployment

Many jobs require literacy. Jobs that don't typically pay 30 to 42 percent less.

## Crime

Illiterates are more likely to commit a crime and end up in jail.

## Long-term illness

If you can't read, it's much harder to access and understand medical information about how to stay healthy. In developing countries, children of literate parents are 50 percent more likely to survive past age 5.

## Prejudice against women

Sixty-four percent of all functionally illiterate people are women. This can reflect discrimination against females in educational opportunities. The results persist throughout life. Women who can't access information about reproduction, schooling and health are less able to participate fully in society, and it's much harder for them to become economically secure. International Literacy Day's website estimates that if all women completed primary education, maternal deaths would drop by two-thirds.



*The daughter of a teacher, this Liberian girl reads a book in her lap. (USAID/Flickr)*

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) celebrated the first International Literacy Day on September 8, 1966. Ever since, it's been a day to promote the importance of a literate society and to raise awareness of the importance of the written word, and to encourage teachers and other

“literacy champions” — like you! — to donate books or host a reading event.

Visit [internationalliteracyday.org](http://internationalliteracyday.org) for inspiration, tweet support

@WorldLiteracy or #LetGirlsLearn, and keep on reading.

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