

Global Competence: The Knowledge and Skills Students Need for Success in an Interconnected World

The concept of global competence articulates the knowledge and skills students need in the 21st century. What makes a student globally competent?

Global Competence: A Definition

Globally competent students must have the knowledge and skills to:

1. **Investigate the World.** Global competence starts by being aware, curious, and interested in learning about the world and how it works. Globally competent students ask and explore critical questions and “researchable” problems—problems for which there may not be one right answer but which can be systematically engaged, both intellectually and emotionally. Their questions are *globally significant*, addressing important phenomena and events that are relevant in their own community and in other communities across the globe.

Globally competent students know how to respond to these questions by identifying, collecting, and analyzing credible information from a variety of local, national, and international sources, including those in multiple languages. They can connect the local to the global. For example, they can explain how a local issue like their school recycling program exemplifies a global process far beyond their backyards.

From analysis to synthesis to evaluation, globally competent students can weigh and integrate evidence to create a coherent response that considers multiple perspectives and draws defensible conclusions. Their responses can take any number of forms, such as an essay, a problem or design solution, a scientific explanation, or a work of art.

2. **Weigh Perspectives.** Globally competent students recognize that they *have* a particular perspective and that others may or may not share it. They are able to articulate and explain the perspectives of other people, groups, or schools of thought. They can also identify influences on these perspectives, including how differential access to knowledge, technology, and resources can affect people’s views. Their understanding of others’ perspectives is deeply informed by historical knowledge about other cultures as well as contemporary events. They can compare their perspective with others and integrate their own and others’ viewpoints to construct a new point of view.
3. **Communicate Ideas.** Globally competent students understand that audiences differ on the basis of culture, geography, faith, ideology, wealth, and other factors. They grasp that various audiences may perceive different meanings from the same information. They can effectively communicate, verbally and non-verbally, with diverse audiences. Because English is increasingly the world’s lingua franca for commerce and communication, globally competent students in the U.S. and elsewhere are proficient in it as well as in at least one other world language.

Communicating ideas occurs in a variety of culturally diverse settings, especially within collaborative teams. Globally competent students are able to situate themselves in a variety of cultural contexts, organize and participate in diverse groups, and work effectively toward a common goal.

Globally competent students are media and artistically savvy. They can choose and effectively use appropriate technology and media to communicate with diverse audiences, including through respectful online social networking. In short, they are technology and media literate within a global communications environment.

- 4. Take Action.** What skills and knowledge will it take to go from learning *about* the world to making a difference *in* the world? First, it requires seeing oneself as capable of making a difference. Globally competent students see themselves as players, not bystanders. They're keenly able to recognize opportunities, from targeted human rights advocacy to creating the next out-of-the-box, must-have business product. Alone or with others, ethically and creatively, globally competent students can envision and weigh options for action based on evidence and insight. They can assess their potential impact, taking into account varied perspectives and potential consequences for others. They then show courage to act and reflect on their actions.

Is global competence all skills and no knowledge? Hardly. As true now as at any other time, *learning content matters*. Global competence requires that the capacities described above be both applied within academic disciplines and contextualized within each discipline's methods of inquiry and production of knowledge. Globally competent students learn to think like historians, scientists, and artists by using the tools and methods of inquiry of the various disciplines.

Global competence also requires the ability to understand prevailing world conditions, issues, and trends through an interdisciplinary lens. This breadth allows students to understand the interconnectedness of any given issue—its broad themes as well as subtle nuances. A competitive advantage will go to those students in San Francisco or São Paulo who know what's going on in the world, can comprehend the interconnectedness of environmental, financial, social, and other systems, and understand how the relative balance of power between societies and cultures has significant short- and long-term consequences. Educating students for global competence requires substantive, developmentally appropriate engagement over time with the world's complexities.

Learning about and with the world occurs within and outside of school, and it is the work of a lifetime. Globally competent students are lifelong learners. They are able to adapt and contribute knowledge and understanding to a world that is constantly, rapidly evolving.

Global competence is a crucial shift in our understanding of the purpose of education in a changing world. Students everywhere deserve the opportunity to succeed in the global economy and contribute as global citizens. We must fashion a more creative and visionary educational response to the interconnected world of the twenty-first century, starting now.