

Word Sorts

From Strategies to Engage the Mind of the Learner

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A *word sort* introduces students to new vocabulary and relationships between concepts. This is an effective pre-reading strategy for introducing important vocabulary words, their meanings, and characteristics. The students take a set of word cards with selected vocabulary words printed on them, and put them into groups based upon similarities and differences in meaning. When students work in small groups to complete this activity, they are learning through talking/listening about word meanings, they are classifying words according to identified characteristics, and they have a chance to learn with others as they work cooperatively to complete a task.

How to Use this Strategy

There are two types of word sorts: open sort and closed sort. With an *open sort*, the teacher presents words to the students and asks them, either working alone or in a small group, to categorize the words into meaningful groups. Students select the categories based upon prior knowledge. Open sorts have students search for meanings and discover relationships among words.

With a *closed sort*, the teacher provides the categories. The closed sort reinforces classification skills.

When to Use this Strategy

- when introducing a new unit of study – serves as a pre-reading activity
- at the end of a unit of study for a review
- to extend the knowledge of a concept already taught
- to teach thinking skills such as classification