

Concept Sorts

Reading Comprehension Strategy

A **Concept Sort** is a vocabulary building comprehension strategy that can be used before, during or after reading a text. As a strategy, it can be used to teach new vocabulary or consolidate previous vocabulary learning.

When used before reading, concept sorts provide an opportunity for a teacher to see what his or her students already know about the content in a text. It allows teachers to introduce the new vocabulary which students will see in the assigned text, supporting them in their navigation of the text. It can also be used to promote understanding of concepts.

When used after reading, teachers can assess their students' understanding of the concepts presented. Concept sorts can be used to review comprehension and understanding after a lesson or unit of learning.

Suggested Learning Outcomes

OL1: Know and use conventions of oral language interaction, in a variety of contexts, including class groups, for a range of purposes such as ... stating an opinion, listening to others... explaining, arguing... speculating

R3: Use a wide range of reading comprehension strategies appropriate to texts... to retrieve information; to link to previous knowledge... to monitor own understanding; to question, analyse...

R10: Know how to use language resources (e.g. dictionary, thesaurus and online resources) in order to assist their vocabulary development

Possible Key Skills

- Communicating
- Being literate
- Managing information and thinking
- Working with others

Preparation

Having selected a text that students will read, choose the vocabulary words that students will encounter in the text. 10-15 words are generally sufficient. Write the words on post-it notes or index cards. A3 sheets of paper are useful if students are working in groups.

Instructions

One approach to concept sorting is to use a **closed sort**. Determine concept categories relevant to vocabulary words. Usually two-four categories is sufficient. This can be done on a whiteboard or on a large sheet of paper. Explain to students that they will encounter these words in the text and that they will then be sorting them into the different categories.

An example might include a lesson where I am teaching students parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and prepositions. I have chosen 10-15 examples from a text and students will categorise them. Similarly, if students have been engaging with a number of dramatic scripts for performance, I could ask students reading a drama script to categorise considerations or concepts into categories relating to the 'actor' or 'producer'.

Modelling this strategy by making your thinking process explicit is crucial for students prior to engaging in the sort. You might ask yourself 'Where have I read this word before?' or 'Is there anything in the word that might give me a clue as to which category it best fits in?' Using two or three defined words, model the process of sorting words into the categories.

Students can engage in a concept sort individually, in small groups or as a whole class and the teacher can monitor and support students, asking questions about any word that might prove challenging.

Have students read the text using context clues within the text and drawing on prior knowledge to determine the meaning of words. You might encourage students to use dictionaries or other language resources to support their learning.

Have students sort the remaining words.

Take some feedback as a whole class. Discuss why certain words were placed in certain categories.

If students are ready, proceed with concept sort variations that require students to determine the categories themselves. This is referred to as an **open sort**.