

# Word Sort

## Wisconsin State Standards Strand

Language

- Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

**Grade Level**  
K-5

## Purpose

Use with students to support vocabulary development: explicitly introduce new words

## When to Use

Before Reading  
After Reading

## Grouping

Whole Group  
Small Group  
Partners

## ABOUT THE STRATEGY

WORD SORTS is a semantic map strategy that helps students improve their vocabulary and categorization skills and learn to organize concepts. Students identify the meaning and properties of each word and then "sort" the list into collections of words with similar features. This "sorting" process links students' prior knowledge to the basic vocabulary of a reading selection. In a closed word sort, the educator provides the categories (and the specific features of each) to the students. The students then match the words with the features to create the word collections. In an open word sort, the educator provides only the list of words. Students work together to discern the common features and to describe the categories for collecting the word groups. Word learning requires multiple exposures to the word within meaningful contexts.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

- Provide students with a list of between 10 and 20 key vocabulary words from a reading selection on index cards.
- Divide the class into small groups of 4 or 5 students. Distribute the index cards.
- For a closed word sort, provide students with the categories into which they will sort the vocabulary words. For an open word sort, instruct the student teams to suggest categories for organizing the words.
- Provide small groups time to assign the words to the appropriate categories.
- Engage students in a whole group discussion with each group presenting their word list for one of the categories. Have students explain their thinking for the way they sorted the terms by asking about the common features of the categories and how each specific word meets these criteria.

## MEASURING PROGRESS

- Teacher observation
- Conferencing
- Student journaling

## RESEARCH

Lenski, Susan D., Wham, Mary Ann, & Johns, Jerry L. (1999). *Reading and learning strategies for middle and high school students*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Vacca, R.D., Vacca J. (1995). *Content area reading*. (5th. Ed.). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.