

# Word Sort

<http://www.readingeducator.com/strategies/sort.htm>

A Word Sort is a simple small group activity. Students list key words from a reading selection. (Alternatively, the teacher may provide a list of terms prior to the reading activity.) 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.

Vacca and Vacca (1996) describe two forms of Word Sorts:

- Closed Word Sort–The teacher 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.
- Open Word Sort–The teacher provides only the list of words. Students work together to discern the common features and to describe the categories for collecting the word groups.

## **Steps to a Word Sort:**

1. List between 10 and 20 key vocabulary words from a reading selection on the chalkboard or on index cards.
2. Divide the class into small groups of 4 or 5 students. (Distribute the index cards if this method is used.)
3. 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.
4. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for the student teams to assign the words to the appropriate categories.
5. Conduct a class discussion with each group presenting their word list for one of the categories. Require the students to defend their sorting of terms by asking about the common features of the categories and how each specific word meets these criteria.

## **Learn More:**

- 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.

