

Word Sorts

What is a Word Sort?

There are two types of word sorts: **open** and **closed**. In closed word sorts the teacher defines the process for categorizing the words; that requires the students to engage in critical thinking as they examine sight vocabulary, corresponding concepts, or word structure. In open word sorts the student determines how to categorize the words, thereby becoming involved in an active manipulation of words.

In a word sort activity, students look at words written on cards and sort them into groups based on various features of the words. At first, words may be sorted according to their number of letters or their initial letters and sounds. Later, students may sort words by patterns or even by meanings. Students must be able to read all words used in sort activities. As they sort the words, children examine the structure of these words and discover patterns. They will compare and contrast words as they develop an understanding of how words work.

Using the Word Sort Cards

One way to introduce word sorts is to have students write their name on a blank card. Students can attach a picture of themselves next to their name. Begin by reading together each name as you place it on a table or in a pocket chart. Have the students group the names by the number of letters. Another day, show students how to sort by initial letter, initial sound and endings.



When students understand how to sort names, move on to sorting spelling words. Be sure that all students can read each word. Have them work together in small groups to sort their words. Ask each group to explain how they sorted the words to gain insight into how they are thinking about the words. Help them make lists of the words that go together. Encourage them to add to their lists as they find new words in their reading. As they write they can refer to their lists to help them spell.

Word Hunt

Have students search for words with a particular pattern such as *short a* words. Have them write the words on the blank word cards provided. When they have found several words, gather all the students together and have them come up with other ways to sort all of the new cards.

Word Study Center

After you have introduced a word sort, that sort can be placed in a word study center. You might store sets of word cards in different boxes labeled by spelling strategy or unit. Clearly label this area. Change activities and patterns often to maintain interest.

Suggested materials:

- magnetic letters
- foam letters
- blank word cards
- pocket chart
- clay for making letters
- words for students to build
- words for students to sort
- letter and pattern sort cards