Graphic Organizers for Connecting and Remembering Information

Remembering and relating information is a common part of learning and daily life. Students are often expected to learn large amounts of new and unfamiliar information. Learning facts requires the student to see how information is connected or related. Students often remember this information better if they see it graphically and understand how it relates to knowledge they already have. Graphic organizers are designed to help students (and teachers) present and organize information so it is easier to understand and remember.

Graphic Organizers

New information is better remembered if it is connected to information the students already know. Graphic organizers are visual representations of information that shows the links of new information to other new and existing information. This makes the new information easier to understand and learn. Furthermore, the visual nature of graphic organizers and the links they make help students understand the connections between information parts. For example, a graphic organizer might be used to teach young children about different animals. A child learning about different kinds of animals might already know what a fish is. This knowledge can be used to graphically organize whales, sharks, and dolphins. They all live underwater, but sharks have gills and are fish. (Whales and dolphins have blowholes and breathe air, so they are not fish.) Figure 1 represents one way to map this graphically.
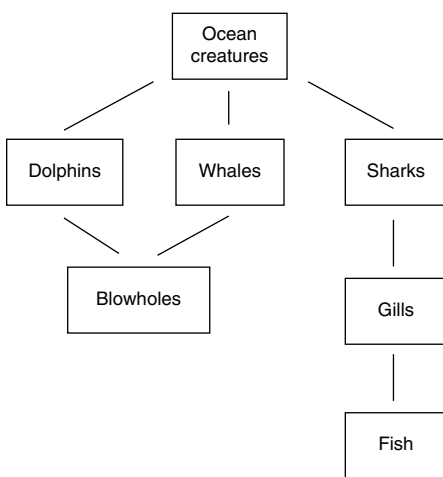

Figure 1. One kind of graphic organizer.

Another type of graphic organizer is a Venn diagram, which uses circles to demonstrate how concepts are related. Figure 2 shows the same information as Figure 1, but in the form of a Venn diagram.

How to Teach Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are fairly simple to create. They need not be reserved for factual information. They can be used for activities such as exploring creative concepts, organizing writing, and developing language skills. The following four steps can be used to create a graphic organizer:

1. Select information that you need to present to the child (which may be from a story, a chapter, or any concept).
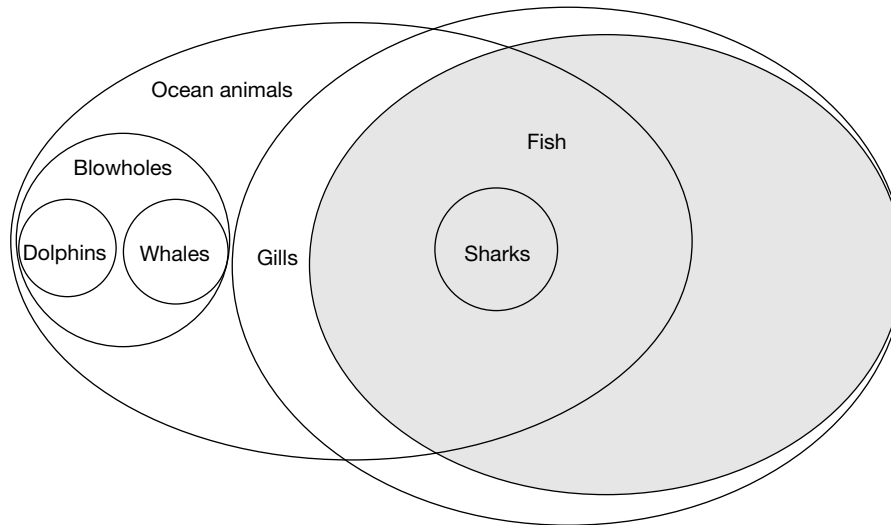2. Determine the key components that are necessary for the child to learn.

Figure 2. A Venn diagram used as a graphic organizer.

3. Create the graphic representation of the information. The illustration should include the key concepts, concepts the child already knows, and the linkages between the concepts.
4. Present the organizer to the child and discuss it to be sure he or she understands the information and sees the connections.

Students may also be taught to develop their own graphic organizers as a strategy to help them understand and learn information independently.

Who Should Learn Graphic Organizers?

Students who have trouble learning new information or organizing information may find graphic organizers helpful. Students who score low in Simultaneous processing have trouble understanding how information is related and may find graphic organizers particularly helpful. They may also be helpful for students who score low in Planning (Naglieri, 1999) as a strategy to help them organize information.

Resources

An excellent resource can be found at http://www.teachervision.fen.com/graphic-organizers/printable/6293.html

Dye, G.A. (2000). Graphic organizers to the rescue! Helping students link—and remember—information. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 32*(3), 72–76.
Naglieri, J.A. (1999). *Essentials of CAS assessment*. New York: John Wiley & Sons*.*