

Teaching the K-W-L Strategy

K-W-L is a simple strategy developed by Karen Ogle (1986) that can be used with any text, age, or grade. It is a great tool for guiding students in research and writing projects. It is also helpful to assist with reading comprehension, especially when working with expository (informational) text. It helps with comprehension because it teaches how to do the things that good readers do—connect to prior knowledge (what I **K**now), set a purpose for reading by asking questions (what I need or **W**ant to know), and reflect on what was read (what I **L**earned).

Remember not to worry! You will not be introducing anything new. I use this technique in our classroom. However, repetition helps to reinforce strategies and increases student retention. These instructions will help you remind the students of strategies to use **before**, **during**, and **after** reading.

I will assign the text to be used by the students and provide you with a flip chart or white board with the K-W-L chart outline (see sample).

1. Tell me what we are going to do.

- Point to the K-W-L chart and tell the students that today they are going to use K-W-L to help them find and remember important information about their topic.
- Ask them to tell you what each letter stands for.

2. Show me how to do it. 3. Help me do it.

- Give each student a K-W-L chart (I will provide handouts).
- Tell student that **before reading** we are going to do some thinking that will help us find a purpose for our reading.
- Begin by asking students to brainstorm, or tell you everything they **Know** about the assigned topic, and record their ideas in the **K** column of the chart. The students should record the ideas in their own copy as well. Keep going until they run out of ideas.

K What I know.	W What I want to know	L What I've learned.

K Column Suggestions

- Have questions ready to help students brainstorm their ideas. Sometimes students need more prompting than, “Tell me everything you know about _____,” to get them started.
- Encourage students to explain their associations. This is especially important for those associations that are vague or unusual. Ask, “What made you think of that?” (NEA.org, 2014)

- Ask students what they **Want** to learn about the topic, and record their ideas in the **W** column of the chart. Keep going until they run out of ideas for questions.
- If they make a statement, ask them to turn it into a question before recording it in the **W** column.
- Remind them that these questions will help give them a purpose for reading and focus their attention on looking for the answers **during reading**.

W Column Suggestions

- Ask an alternative question for generating ideas for the W column. If, in response to “What do you want to learn about this topic?” your students are either having trouble coming up with ideas, or are saying, “nothing,” try asking one of the following questions instead: “What do you think you will learn about this topic from the text you will be reading?” Choose an idea from the K column and ask, “What would you like to learn more about this idea?”
- Come prepared with your own questions to add to the W column. You might want students to focus on ideas in the text on which the students’ questions are not likely to focus them. Be sure not to add too many of your own questions, however. The majority of the questions in the W column should be student-generated.
(NEA.org, 2014)

4. Let me do it.

- Read the assigned selection. I will give directions as to whether I would like you to read aloud or have the students read the text independently. (I will provide a copy of the text in advance so that you can be familiar with it and prepared to help the students.)
- Pass out sticky notes (I will provide) and tell students they can tag sections that answer their questions. They will also need to record the page or paragraph number of where an answer is located in column **L**.

5. Check my understanding.

- Have students complete the **L** column of their charts. Students should look for the answers to the questions in their W column. Students can fill out their **L** columns as they read or after reading.
- Observe what they are recording in the **L** column. If a student seems to be struggling to find an answer, offer prompts if needed. You might suggest a page to look at, or ask them to look for a heading that might give them a clue about where to find the answer.

L Column Suggestions

- In addition to answering the W column questions, encourage students to write in the L column anything they found especially interesting. To distinguish between the answers to their questions and the ideas they found interesting, have students code the information in their L columns. For example, they can put a check mark next to the information that answers questions from the K column. And they can put a star next to ideas that they found interesting.
- Have students consult other resources to find out the answers to questions that were not answered in the text. (It is unlikely that all of the students’ questions in the W column will be answered by the text.)
(NEA.org, 2014)

- **After reading**, discuss what they learned and recorded in the **L** column and record a few answers on the flip chart.
- Ask if there are any questions that were not answered in the text. Encourage students to find answers to these questions in other resources.

Example

Following is an example of a completed K-W-L chart that students might complete if they were reading a text about gravity (NEA.org, 2014).

Topic: GRAVITY

K	W	L
It keeps us from floating around.	What is gravity?	Gravity is the force that pulls objects towards Earth.
It makes things fall.	Why is there less gravity on the moon?	The amount of gravity there is depends on the masses of the objects involved. The moon is a lot less massive than the earth, so there is less gravity on the moon than there is on earth.
There is less gravity on the moon.	How did Newton discover gravity?	
Isaac Newton discovered gravity.	What determines how fast something will fall to the ground? (<i>teacher question</i>)	Air resistance determines how fast something will fall to the ground.

References:

NEA.org (2014). K-W-L (Know, Want to Know, Learned). Retrieved February 12, 2014 from <http://www.nea.org/tools/k-w-l-know-want-to-know-learned.html>.

Ogle, D.M. 1986. K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *Reading Teacher* 39: 564-570.