

The Power of K-W-L

Anyone who has attended [my workshops](#) on formative assessment, learning modalities or differentiated instruction knows that I am a huge fan of graphic organizers. They offer students and teachers easy ways to organize information and present it visually and logically.

There are [many kinds of graphic organizers](#) to choose from, including compare/contrast (Venn), sequential, cause/effect and many others.

My personal favorite is the [KWL Chart](#). KWL stands for what I already **know**, what I **want** to learn and what I have **learned**. (There are a few variations of the KWL, including KWS -- what **sources** will I use to learn more -- and KWLH -- adds one more column for **how** I can learn more. Most of the comments below apply to these as well.)

I like the KWL for many reasons:

1. *Ease of use* -- The KWL is easy to use as it allows students to quickly add information into the first two columns. The paper can be left with them so that as new learning occurs, students can fill in the third column as well.
2. *Sense of knowledge* -- Completed columns in a KWL give students visual evidence of what they already know. This excites them and motivates them to learn more.
3. *And achievement* -- As noted above, students complete the third column as they learn new information or at the end of a lesson/unit. They feel accomplished and satisfied when so much is added to the final column.
4. *Circle the Sage* -- Circle the Sage is a great cooperative learning technique that offers students the opportunity to speak with resident class "sages" who have expertise in a particular topic, such as a place that they visited or a personal hobby. By completing KWL charts, teachers can identify sages for this exercise.
5. *Content differentiation / pre-assessment* -- This may be the greatest benefit of all. Instructional differentiation presumes teacher awareness of student knowledge

entering into each unit of study.

Doing a pre-assessment, either in a conventional test format or through use of a KWL, gives teachers feedback about what their students know and what content they need to deliver.

As with any graphic organizer, the KWL chart has limits, such as when students possess little to no prior learning on a particular topic. That said, it has many great qualities that make it a "must use" in the classroom.

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