

Designing Effective Projects: Tapping Prior Knowledge Know-Wonder-Learn Charts

Learning About Know-Wonder-Learn Charts

A Know-Wonder-Learn (K-W-L) chart is one of the most commonly used graphic organizers to tap students' prior knowledge. This simple chart activates students' prior knowledge by asking them what they already know about a particular subject. This allows the students to make personal connections before the content is deeply explored. The students brainstorm their ideas on the Know section of the chart. Then the students independently or collaboratively brainstorm questions they have about the content in the Want to Learn section. Once students begin to answer these questions during a project, they record this information on the Learn section of the chart.

By using this chart, students are constructing meaning from what they've been learning, comparing their new knowledge to what they already know, and are able to clarify their ideas. This also keeps students focused and interested in the content and is a way to keep track of what they are learning. Ultimately, the chart could be used as a document for an assessment portfolio to show what the student has learned.

A K-W-L chart can be used across the curriculum at any grade level. It can be used to start a new unit of study and referred to throughout the unit. It is usually not a graded document but rather a place for students to write down their ideas and questions without the fear of being judged or graded. This chart also helps with student organization and can be a starting point for peer-to-peer or whole-class discussion.

Example K-W-L Chart

This sample K-W-L chart is from the Unit Plan, [African Adventure Safari](#).

Name _____



K-W-L Chart For The Cheetah



Write about what you know about your African animal. Then write questions about what you want to know. When we have finished the unit, you can write about what you've learned.

What I Know:	What I Want to Know:	What I Learned:
<p>Example <i>A cheetah eats antelope.</i></p>	<p>Example <i>How does a cheetah kill the antelope? Where do antelope live? How many antelope will a cheetah eat in one week? Do antelope ever escape from the cheetah?</i></p>	<p>Example <i>Cheetahs will run at 70 mph to catch the antelope. They find the antelope grazing on the African savannah. The cheetahs have to suffocate the antelope because they have small jaws and can't kill in one bite.</i></p>