

This tool assesses what students already **K**now, what they **W**ant to know, and what they have **L**earned.

## K-W-L

**H**ave you ever wondered . . . *What is the speed of darkness? Why does the sun lighten our hair, but darken our skin?* Inquiry is natural and we all seek new information to answer the questions we have. Humans are creatures that desire to learn. We are motivated to research, question, and discover answers to questions daily. This is what makes the human brain fascinating.



Teachers can ignite the quest for learning and facilitate inquiry using the **K-W-L** strategy. **K-W-L** is used to assess what the students already **K**now, track what feedback the students **W**ant to know, and monitor what the students have **L**earned about a given topic. **This tool sets a purpose for all phases of learning by identifying prior knowledge, desired knowledge, and checking how successfully students learned.**

After students identify what they already know about the subject matter, they generate a list of information or questions regarding the topic. Following lessons taught by the teacher, or projects researched by the students, students indicate what they have learned during the lesson.

The **K-W-L** chart is divided into three columns. To start, students write what they **K**now about a topic, and what they **W**ant to know. At the end of the lesson, students add what to the chart what they have **L**earned. This note-taking tool guides students through a three-step process to activate background knowledge, develop a purpose for learning, and summarize to reinforce new knowledge.

K-W-L		
What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned



## K-W-L (continued)

K-W-L can be used for any subject area at any grade level. It is a graphic organizer to help students organize concepts before, during, and after a topic of study. It can be used to excite and engage students on a subject, help them recall previous knowledge, share lesson objectives, and monitor learning. Motivation and relevance for learning is increased because students are given a chance to provide input to the lessons. K-W-L provides a structure for students to use vocabulary, terms, and concepts and shows the teacher how the students are thinking about the subject matter as a check for understanding.

### How to Use K-W-L

#### 1. Know

Give each student a K-W-L chart or have them draw one on a piece of paper. Initiate discussion with the students about what they already know about a new topic of study. Have them write what they know in the **K** column.

During this step, identify where students may have misperceptions or inaccuracies and correct these. Or, you may decide to let students discover their errors on their own during the learning process.

#### 2. Want to Know

Discuss with the students what they want to learn or have students talk in pairs. Then, ask students to write down the specific questions they have about the topic in the **W** column.

If students struggle with this section, it may be a result of not having much prior knowledge about the topic. Prompt their thinking by listing suggestions using question starters (who, what, where, when, why, and how) on the board.

#### 3. Learned

At the end of the lesson, ask students if they learned the answers to any of the questions they posted in their **W** columns. Share any “ahas” with the group, then ask students to post their answers to the **L** column.

Encourage students to add to this column throughout the lesson or unit. As students review what they have learned, direct them to constantly try to answer all the questions they identified and check off their progress. If there were any misconceptions at the start of the lesson or unit which you opted to allow students to discover on their own, ensure at this stage that those misconceptions have been self-corrected. Or, correct now as needed.

### When to Use K-W-L

Use K-W-L to organize student perceptions and understandings:

- ♦ When opening and closing any lesson or unit
- ♦ As a way to help students access background knowledge
- ♦ To help students formulate questions and document information learned

### K-W-L Variations

#### Reading K-W-L

Use a K-W-L chart to monitor learning while students are reading. As they read, have students formulate new questions in the **Want to Know** section and record answers to their questions in the **Learned** section.



## K-W-L (continued)

### K-W-L-S/I/F/R

To add depth and challenge to student learning, add the following:

- ♦ S column for students to note what they Still want to learn about the topic
- ♦ I column to list why this information is Important
- ♦ F column to list where they Found this information for resources
- ♦ R column for listing something they hope to Remember

### Foldable Templates

Have students fold a blank sheet of paper into thirds (like folding a letter to go into an envelope). Then open the paper and place it on the desk in landscape orientation. Next, have the students fold the top of the page 1½ inch from the top. Unfold again and lay flat. The folded lines create the template for the K-W-L chart. Label the top above the horizontal line with K, W, and L.

### Value of Using K-W-L

- ♦ Initiates inquiry
- ♦ Provides direction for the course of study
- ♦ Allows students to contribute to the lesson objectives
- ♦ Monitors the learning in a unit of study
- ♦ Provides opportunities for teachers to informally assess prior, during, and at the conclusion of lessons
- ♦ Engages prior knowledge
- ♦ Allows teachers to facilitate critical questioning
- ♦ Provides a structure and organization for assessing concepts learned in a lesson or unit

Using K-W-L, teachers can continually assess the students' knowledge to appropriately plan lessons, adjust instruction, and bring logical closure to the lesson.