Word Sort

Word sorts are a strategy for examining and categorizing words according to their meanings. Word sorts can be used as a formative assessment tool to determine if students grasp the understanding of vocabulary words or how various concepts fit together. Word sorts can also be a pre-assessment tool used to identify prior knowledge about a topic or concept. When used this way, word sorts can be used to plan instruction.

Procedure:

1. Students work in pairs to categorize a random list of words (or phrases) related to the topic (selected by the teacher from reading material students are going to encounter). In an open word sort, the students sort the words and label the categories created. In a closed word sort, the teacher provides the categories into which the words are sorted.
2. Monitor groups by asking probing questions (who, what, why, when, where, how).
3. Pair two groups together to discuss their categorization results or have all groups rotate around the room to preview the various word sorts made by all the groups.
4. Discuss similarities and differences among the groups.
5. Distribute copies of the book or reading selection (text from which the vocabulary terms were selected).
6. Have the students read the text independently.
7. Ask students to re-categorize the list of words based on the new information in the book or reading selection.
8. Ask probing questions:
   - Did you find answers to your questions?
   - What questions are still unanswered or what information is still unclear?
   - What additional information did you learn from the book?
   - What was the most interesting or surprising information?
   - What have you learned from reading this book?