

CHAPTER ONE

Why Are Graphic Organizers Such Important Tools for Teaching and Learning?

Graphic organizers are important and effective pedagogical tools for organizing content and ideas and facilitating learners' comprehension of newly acquired information. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1993, 2006) posits that students are better able to learn and internalize information when more than one learning modality is employed in an instructional strategy. Because graphic organizers present material through the visual and spatial modalities (and reinforce what is taught in the classroom), the use of graphic organizers helps students internalize what they are learning.

For today's classroom, nothing is more essential to successful teaching and learning than strategy-based instruction. It is through the use of specific teaching strategies and learning tools that students can be more successful learners. Graphic organizers are teaching and learning tools; when they're integrated into classroom experiences, students are better able to understand new material. Creating a strong visual picture, graphic organizers support students by enabling them to literally see connections and relationships between facts, information, and terms.

This book contains 100 graphic organizers, teaching and learning tools that support success and active, effective learning in the classroom. Students are

prompted to ask questions and encouraged to build and apply crucial thinking skills while developing tools for learning. You can use the graphic organizers in this book for

- Curriculum planning and development
- Teaching and supporting student comprehension in learning new material
- Classroom assessment
- Building students' learning skills

Reaching *All* Learners

By integrating text and visual imagery, the 100 graphic organizers featured in this book actively engage a wide variety of learners, including students with special needs and English language learners. These organizers can be used for any subject matter and are easily integrated into course curriculum.

We know from learning theory that the human mind naturally organizes and stores information. Our minds create structures to store newly acquired information and connect it to previous knowledge (Piaget, 1974). The graphic organizers featured in this book are visualizations of these mental storage systems, and serve to support students in remembering and connecting information (Vygotsky, 1962). When students are able to remember and assimilate information, they can delve into more critical thinking.

Numerous studies have found graphic organizers to be effective for teaching and learning, and many support the effectiveness of graphic organizers for gifted children and students with special needs (Cassidy, 1991). Textbook publishers have taken note of the research that supports the importance of graphic organizers for teaching and learning, and regularly feature them in textbooks.

Because graphic organizers are widely successful, these learning tools are used at all grade levels. They are also effective for adult learners. Community colleges and corporate entities use graphic organizers to present information in similar instructive contexts. Often you will see college-level textbooks and corporate instructional materials use graphic organizers. The visually stimulating nature of graphic organizers draws the learner's attention. As learners, we attend to what is novel and visually intriguing because the brain is more equipped to process images than text. Because graphic organizers integrate text and visual images, learners are having more whole-brain experiences.

In addition, for all learners, but for adult learners in particular, graphic organizers facilitate the integration of long-term memory and new learning. Adult learners generally have more background and long-term knowledge, and graphic organizers bridge what adult learners already know with what they are learning. Graphic organizers actually trigger long-term memory and promote synthesis with new information (Materna, 2007).

Getting Started

This book is divided into chapters based on the different applications of the graphic organizers. You, the teacher, are the best judge of which organizers are best for a given lesson. Here are some suggestions and bits of advice as you decide which organizers to use for a specific instructional purpose:

Modeling. It is critical to model the graphic organizer when you present it to the class. Show the students how you, as a learner, use this organizer to understand material.

Learning experiences. You can use the graphic organizers in this book for individual or small group instruction. In general, graphic organizers are great for cooperative learning because they provide a structure for the students.

Assessment. Assessment should be reliable and varied. As students progress through middle school and high school, quizzes and tests become more common, but they are only one kind of assessment. Graphic organizers can be easily used for classroom assessment. For example, you could use the Questioning the Author activity (Chapter Five) to determine if the students read the pages that were assigned for homework. You will probably gain greater insight into the students' comprehension of the text than you would with a multiple-choice reading quiz.

Special needs. Students with special needs often have difficulty decoding and comprehending text and developing vocabulary. This makes reading even more challenging. Here are some suggestions to support students with special needs when they use the graphic organizers in this book:

1. Physically divide some of the organizers by cutting, folding, or highlighting different sections. This helps the students focus on one section and activity at a time.
2. Use a highlighter or different colors for the graphic organizer headings to help students process and focus on key information.
3. Have students work in pairs or in small groups, as needed. Students who have difficulty with attention and reading will benefit from working with their peers. Working in a social setting helps all students work collaboratively and take responsibility for their own learning. We want our students to develop self-efficacy in their learning experiences.
4. Create reading frames for students. Using heavy card stock or cardboard, create frames of different sizes so that students can place them over sections. This helps students focus on one section at a time.
5. Encourage students to use vocabulary logs or notebooks. All the vocabulary graphic organizers that are featured in Chapter Three can be used as templates for a vocabulary log or notebook. This is a student-created vocabulary reference book to which the students can refer during the course of the school year.

Variations. There is no one right way to visually represent information. Your students may have several variations of the same organizer for a given topic or subject. Further, some students are more visually oriented than others, so you should expect to see a range of results. Particularly helpful to English language learners, the graphic organizers featured in this book support students in understanding language more easily with the assistance of visual images.

The key to successful teaching and learning is to employ a wide variety of strategies. I hope that the 100 graphic organizers in this book will add to your repertoire of strategies to reach *all* kinds of learners in your teaching.

You can download PDF versions of the graphic organizers found in this book at
www.josseybass.com/go/graphicorganizers
Password: 4g6hn7

