

CHAPTER ONE

What Are Graphic Organizers and Why Are They So Important for Teaching and Learning?

Graphic organizers are visual representations of information and concepts. By nature, we tend to learn in pictures; as such, the graphic organizer is a more innate structure for processing information than recording information exclusively in words. In addition, because graphic organizers use visual images and words, they are more effective tools for learning for a wide variety of learners, such as English language learners and students with special needs.

Why are graphic organizers such effective teaching and learning tools?

- They help students to focus on important and key information.
- We learn in pictures, and graphic organizers are a visual representation of newly learned material.
- Graphic organizers help us organize content information.
- Businesses and professional organizations often use graphic organizers to represent content. As students become able to create, interpret, analyze, and synthesize information graphically, they are developing important skills in visual literacy.
- We can use graphic organizers for assessment. Students can represent what they know and understand in a graphic organizer. I always advise teachers to instruct their students to write an explanation, description, or narrative of the graphic organizer, explaining why certain information is included and how it's organized.

- When students are exposed to a wide variety of graphic organizers, they become more willing to use them for note taking and studying.

How Is This Book Organized?

Each graphic organizer is presented with an overview, tips for classroom implementation, and student samples.

Overview

In the overview of each strategy for each organizer, you will see a graphic that illustrates the complexity or challenge of each: easy, medium, or hard. The overview also contains instructional information to increase the effectiveness of each graphic organizer in the classroom.

Tips for Classroom Implementation

This section of each organizer presents specific information and suggestions for implementing the graphic organizer in classroom practice. The following general classroom implementation tips apply to all graphic organizers:

- “I Do, We Do, You Do” is an instructional strategy wherein the teacher models the completion of the graphic organizer in the “I Do” step; in “We Do,” the students use the graphic organizer with the teacher’s guidance and modeling; and in the “You Do” stage, the students are ready to use the graphic organizer independently.
- Consider making three-dimensional models of the graphic organizers using construction paper and markers. You’ll find examples of these three-dimensional graphic organizers throughout the book. This kind of organizer is especially appealing for visual and kinesthetic learners.
- Model the use of different colored markers and pencils for the information and content recorded on the graphic organizer, and encourage your students to use them. Color-coding is a useful strategy for all kinds of learners; it is particularly beneficial for students with special needs, who may have a disability that makes informational organization more challenging.
- Experiment with and use a wide variety of graphic organizers. There are many ways to organize information. Demonstrate and motivate your students to try multiple graphic organizers and strategies so that they can think critically about information in a wide variety of ways.
- If you are using graphic organizers with your students for the first time (as in the beginning of the school year), I suggest that you begin with more simple graphic organizers. Once the students master these, begin to implement increasingly more difficult and complex ones. Also, encourage your students to create their own graphic organizers or make adaptations to the ones that you provide.
- When students are working in groups and using graphic organizers, remind them of the skills that are important for effective collaborative learning. For example, model and discuss turn-taking, questioning, listening, speaking, and respecting each member of the group.
- Encourage discussion of the concepts and relationships that are represented in the graphic organizers. These associations are important for student learning.
- Model and remind students that the same information can be represented in many different ways.
- Include vocabulary, pictures, and icons in graphic organizers to place greater emphasis on key information and relationships to help English language learners and students with special needs grasp concepts.

- When using graphic organizers for assessment, make sure that students have already used them in your classroom. Asking students to create graphic organizers to represent what they know, understand, and comprehend is also effective. Students who have special needs and may have a disability that makes writing difficult can more easily complete a graphic organizer, which requires less writing, to demonstrate their understanding of content. You might also consider conducting a mini conference with the students so they have the opportunity to explain the relationships and associations of the material.
- Create an information sheet to send home to parents explaining the structure and purpose of graphic organizers being used during instruction. When parents understand the purpose of graphic organizers, they can support their child's learning. Encourage parents to use the graphic organizers at home with their children.

Student Samples

The book provides student samples to demonstrate some possible responses to each graphic organizer. These samples were created by K–5 students.

Summary

Graphic organizers are an effective teaching and learning tool for all types of learners. These organizational frameworks support students' thinking and comprehension and also stimulate social interactions.

I believe in the power of graphic organizers, which is supported by many researchers. When graphic organizers become part of instruction, there is a greater emphasis on more inquiry, process, and critical-thinking learning. Better questioning, reasoning, and thinking become more evident among students and teachers. Teachers often report that when they begin to use graphic organizers in class, students have a better understanding and retention of newly learned content.

Using a wide variety of teaching and learning strategies leads to the most successful and engaging classroom experiences for students. Graphic organizers are one type of strategy. I hope that the over one hundred strategies in this book will support you in meeting the needs of the varied learners within your classroom.

You can download PDF versions of many of the graphic organizers found in this book at
www.josseybass.com/go/elementaryGO
Password: 56jm29

