

- Are they using the context clues to construct appropriate definitions?
- Are they able to see whether some definitions are better than others?

## Giving students opportunities to use new vocabulary

The following strategies can help students studying specific subject matter to recall newly learned vocabulary and to use it effectively.

## Strategies for assisting memory

Students need many exposures to their new vocabulary in order to link it to their prior understandings and become fluent in using it.

### CONCEPT CIRCLES

The teacher writes a set of words or terms in a circle on the board, and the students discuss the meanings of the words and the relationships between both the words and their meanings.

#### The purpose of the strategy

This strategy helps students to explain concepts (including the meanings of words) and to see the connections between concepts (and between words).

#### What the teacher does

- Draw a circle on the board and divide it into four segments.
- In each segment, write a key word associated with the subject content. The four words all need to express concepts that relate to each other.

#### What the students do

- The students discuss the words in the circle with a partner, working out and explaining the conceptual relationships that link the words.
- They share and discuss their ideas with the whole class.

#### What the teacher looks for

- Are the students explaining the links?
- How accurately are the students using the specialised words when they are explaining the relationships between concepts?

#### Variations on the strategy

- **Blank segments:** The teacher can leave one segment of the circle blank and ask the students to first work out what the missing concept or term is and then explain that decision to a group or the class.
- **A whole-class activity:** Each student is given a word or term. They move around the class, find a partner, and make a clear connection between their words or terms. Each pair then links up with another pair and makes connections between all four terms. This continues until the class is in about six groups. Each group explains to the class the connections that they worked out.

## PAIR DEFINITIONS

The students work in pairs. One student writes a definition for a given word, and then the other student, who has not seen the original word, writes a word that fits the definition.

### The purpose of the strategy

This strategy gives students the opportunity to recall, and then write, their own definition of a word and to find out how well their definition conveys the intended word to another student. It gives teachers the opportunity to assess their students' understanding of key words.

### What the teacher does

- Prepare two charts (see below). Each chart consists of three columns:
  - The first column is headed “Words” and contains a list of key words.
  - The second column is headed “Definitions” and is left blank.
  - The third column is headed “Words” and is left blank.

The two charts should have different lists of key words in the first column.

Words	Definitions	Words
[Key word]		
[Key word]		
[Key word]		

- Have the students work in pairs. Give one student in each pair a copy of the first chart, and give the other student a copy of the second chart.

### What the students do

- In the second column (Definitions), each student writes a definition for each word listed in the first column. The student then folds the paper along the vertical line between the first and second columns so that their partner can see the definitions but not the original words.
- The students swap papers with their partners and read their partners' definitions. Each student then writes in the third column (Words) the word that they think their partner has defined.
- When each student has completed their chart, they open it out, compare it with their partner's, and discuss any issues. If they have two different words for one definition, they discuss whether the two words could mean the same thing. They can also discuss whether the definitions were clear enough to indicate one specific meaning or whether they were ambiguous.