

WORD GRIDS

This strategy involves building a grid in which essential vocabulary is listed on one axis of the grid and major features, characteristics, or important ideas are listed on the other axis. Students fill in the grid, indicating the extent to which the key words possess the stated features or are related to important ideas. Once the grid is completed, students are led to discover both the shared and unique characteristics of the vocabulary words.

Figure 6.2 is a word grid created for a study of polygons. Notice that the vertical axis contains the names of geometric figures, whereas the horizontal axis contains important features or characteristics of these figures. The extra spaces allow students to add more vocabulary and features as they work through the reading material.

Another example of the use of word grids (see Figure 6.3) is provided by Aaron, a 10th-grade government teacher, who is particularly effective in teaching key terms and concepts with semantic-feature analysis. He begins by asking his class for the names of fruit, writing them on the blackboard in a vertical list as students call them out. After several fruits are listed, he writes a couple of general features of fruit along the top horizontal axis of the grid, such as “tree grown” and “edible skin”; then he asks for additional features. Finally, he asks the class to consider each type of fruit and whether it possesses any of the listed features. As they go down the list of fruit, they discuss each one relative to the characteristics listed across the top, and Aaron puts a 0, 1, or 2 in the box where the fruit and feature meet on the grid. A 0 indicates that the fruit possesses none of that feature, a 1 indicates that it possesses some of that feature, and a 2 means that it possesses all of the feature. When the grid is entirely filled in, Aaron explains to the students how they can, at a glance, determine the key characteristics of a particular fruit, as well as the similarities and differences between the fruits.

By involving students in the construction of a simple word grid, Aaron introduces them to the semantic-feature analysis process. He goes on to explain how to build word grids for the key vocabulary in their textbook. To help students discover how the grid-building process can be applied to the content vocabulary in their texts, he presents a grid based on a section of a recently completed chapter on the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution. Aaron tells them that in building the grid, he first read the selection and identified the major ideas. Next, he listed in a phrase or a single word the vocabulary that represented or was related to each idea. This was followed by an examination of the list to determine which words represent the biggest ideas (indicated by asterisks in Figure 6.4).

Then Aaron identified the words representing the important details related to the major ideas. At this point, he says, he now had enough information to organize the vocabulary and major ideas into a grid, with the major ideas across the top and the related vocabulary listed on the side (Figure 6.5).

Aaron then walks students through the process of deciding on components of the grid, discussing with them the relationship between each major idea and each vocabulary word as they fill in the grid together.

Later, as his students improve their ability to design word grids, Aaron gives them increasing responsibility to complete grids on their own. This is accomplished by providing them with partially filled-in grids containing a few key vocabulary words and major ideas or essential features. As students move through the chapter or unit of study, they expand the grid work to include additional vocabulary and features.