**﻿Card Sorts**

**﻿Description**

*Card Sorts* is a sorting activity in which students group a set of cards with pictures or words on them according to a certain characteristic or category. Students sort the cards based on their preexisting ideas about the concepts, objects, or pro  
  
cesses on the cards. As students sort the cards, they discuss their reasons for placing each card into a particular group.

**﻿How this FACT promotes student learning**

*Card Sorts* allows students to access their prior knowledge. It also promotes metacognition by bringing uncertainties to the surface. As students work in pairs or small groups to sort the cards, they justify their own ideas, practice skills of argumentation, consider the ideas of others, and modify their own thinking as new information is obtained. This also allows students to realize that sometimes things don't always fit into neat categories.

**﻿How this FACT informs instruction**

*Card Sorts* provide a way for teachers to elicit students' preconceptions, assess students' ability to transfer knowledge when provided with new examples or contexts, and look for areas of uncertainty or disagreement among students that may signify the need for further instruction. While students discuss their ideas, the teacher circulates around the classroom listening to students agree, disagree, or express uncertainty. The teacher notes ideas that are most problematic to become the focus of future lessons.  
  
﻿Design and administration  
Prepare sets of cards that aligCCn with the content goal of the lesson. You can place text on index cards or make cards from preprinted matchbook-size squares on a sheet of paper and have students cut them out. Provid. e students with a category header under which to sort their cards. Encourage students to lay out each card in a row or column under the category header rather than on top of each other so that you can see how students sort each individual item. Have students work in small groups to discuss each of the cards and come to common agreement on which category to place it in before sorting the next card. Listen carefully to students as they discuss and argue their ideas. Note examples where instructional opportunities may need to be designed to challenge students' ideas. If a record of students' thinking is needed, provide individual students and/or small groups with a recording sheet to note where each card was placed along with a justification for its placement.

**﻿General Implementation Attributes**

Ease of Use: High Time Demand: Medium Cognitive Demand: Medium

**﻿Modifications**

For younger students or fluent readers, use pictures of familiar objects or combine pictures with words. Limit to no more than two sorting categories for younger students-those that fit the concept and those that do not. For older students, consider using multiple categories where appropriate. Consider adding a third category such as "it depends on" or "not sure".

**﻿Caveats**

This FACT can turn into a vocabulary exercise if the words are unfamiliar to students. Some students, particulary English-language learners, may need help reading the cards or require visual cues. Emphasize that students need to talk about each card before they assign it to a category. Discourage students from quickly sorting all the cards first and then discussing them.

**﻿Use in other disciplines**

This FACT can be used in science, math, social studies, language arts, health, foreign languages, and performing arts.  
  
Keeley, Paige. (2008) *Science Formative Assessment: 75 Practical Strategies for Linking Assessment, Instruction, and Learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press