Activating Prior Knowledge
Tapping into students’ existing knowledge of a subject to increase future learning gains

**Key Method**
The educator designs an expository reading activity that incorporates the activation and use of student’s prior knowledge to improve learning gains.

**Method Components**
The educator guides students through a three-step activity aimed at activating students’ prior knowledge and leveraging that knowledge to improve learning outcomes. This activity can be conducted individually, in small groups, or in whole-group instruction.

**Three-step framework for activating prior knowledge**
(This framework is commonly referred to as a K-W-L activity.)

1. Access what the students already know about the subject of the expository reading and organize the prior knowledge into general categories.
2. Determine what the students would like to learn using those general categories as guidance.
3. Have students list and recall what was learned as a result of the expository reading.

**Suggested strategy for conducting a K-W-L activity**

1. Accessing what students know and organizing that knowledge into general categories of information
   - Encourage students to brainstorm what they already know about the topic of the expository text. During this step, the educator records whatever the students volunteer about the topic for the class to see. “The critical component here is to select a key concept for the brainstorming that is specific enough to generate the kinds of information that will be pertinent to the reading” (Ogle 565).
   - Encourage students to think of what they already know about a topic in terms of more general categories of information likely to be encountered when they read. The educator then uses these categories to help the students compartmentalize their prior knowledge and focus their reading.
     a. **Example:** “I see three different pieces of information about how turtles look. Description or looks is certainly one category of information I would expect this article to include.” (The teacher then writes this category description, “how sea turtles look,” under the Categories of Information heading.) The teacher proceeds, “Can you find another category from the information we’ve volunteered?” (Ogle 565).
   - Students can then use this knowledge of general categories of information to store their new specific data about whatever topic they are reading. This is also a helpful tool for the educator to determine how much prior knowledge students have on the subject of the reading.

2. Determining what the students would like to learn
   - After the educator has created general categories of information associated with the students’ prior knowledge, he or she highlights disagreements or gaps in the information volunteered by the students.
The students use these gaps or disagreements to generate their own questions associated with the selected text.

3. After reading the text, the students recall what they learned.
   - “After completing the article, direct the audience to write down what they learned from reading. Have them check their questions to determine if the article dealt with their concerns. If not, suggest further reading to fulfill their desires to know. In this way, you are setting the clear priority of their personal desire to learn over simply taking in what the author has chosen to include” (Ogle 567).

Supporting Research
Research shows that all knowledge is connected to prior knowledge. “Prior knowledge is extremely important in influencing how we interpret what we read and what we learn from reading” (Anderson).


Resources

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria
Following are the items you must submit to earn this micro-credential and the criteria by which they will be evaluated. To earn the micro-credential, you must receive passing evaluations for Parts 1 and 3 and a “Yes” for Part 2.

Part 1. Overview questions
(200-word limit for each response)

- **Activity Description:** What kind of project or activity did you and your students engage in to activate prior knowledge? Please describe the learning activity and strategy you used.
  - **Passing:** Activity description is clear with sufficient detail to illustrate what the educator did to demonstrate competency.
- **Activity Evaluation**: How do you know your students increased their proficiency by engaging in the activity, and what evidence did you collect that demonstrates these learning gains?
  - **Passing**: Activity evaluation process and evidence are clear, appropriate, and sufficient to evaluate the competencies.

### Part 2. Evidence/artifacts

Please submit examples of student work from two students (writing, audio, images, video, other media) that demonstrate progress toward the activating prior knowledge competency. This may include completed K-W-L charts, video of discussions and reading, or other evidence of competency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Yes”</th>
<th>“Almost”</th>
<th>“Not Yet”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student work examples show conclusive evidence that activation of prior knowledge led to increased learning gains, and the activated knowledge is clearly and unambiguously linked to the expository reading prompt</td>
<td>Student work examples show some evidence of how activation of prior knowledge led to increased learning gains. However, learning gains are ambiguously or unclearly associated with the expository text</td>
<td>Student work examples show no evidence of how activation prior knowledge was activated, and the activated knowledge has little to do with the expository text</td>
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### Part 3. Teacher reflection

(200-word limit for each response)

- How did the activity associated with your demonstration of activating prior knowledge help to improve learning outcomes?
  - **Passing**: Educator reflection clearly indicates how the activating prior knowledge activity led to improved learning outcomes.

- Were there any relevant challenges, observations, or modifications you made while demonstrating competency in activating prior knowledge?
  - **Passing**: Educator reflection includes relevant challenges, observations, or modifications made by the teacher in order to demonstrate competency. Modifications are appropriate, given the context described in part one.