

What card sorting activities can I use?

Card sorting activities are an effective way to provide a focus and structure for small group discussions in geography classrooms. The cards are often seen as a puzzle to be solved and this creates a relaxed atmosphere where students can make mistakes and correct them after talking about possible solutions. The teacher can monitor the learning and intervene as necessary to support learners. Card sorting activities can lead on to writing about what has been discussed.

Short text extracts, diagrams, photos etc. can be made into 'cards' for different classroom activities. It is useful to create cards to help students focus on one or two sentences or one image to aid analysis without the distraction of surrounding text or images. It can be useful for students to copy out a relevant sentence onto a separate card or piece of paper to use in an activity. Try to avoid spending a long time cutting and pasting cards yourself – although with careful management they can be reused several times.

Card ordering and sorting can also be a prelude to extended writing, especially where the cards contain sections of writing (words, phrases, sentences) because the cards enable students to 'play' with text before committing themselves to writing anything down. The discussion that accompanies the sorting also aids the learning process and helps students to structure an argument.

Some of the activities discussed are very appropriate to use for the recall of previous learning in retrieval practice; or provide opportunities for students to think hard about new concepts and ideas in independent practice.

Reading

- Nash, P. 'Card sorting activities in the geography classroom', *Teaching Geography*, January 1997
- Norton, A. 'On the cards', *Teaching Geography*, January 1999

Examples of different types of card sort activity

Matching

- Matching cards (text) to diagrams: In *Teaching Geography* January 1999 an example of volcano activity
- Matching cards to Maps: *Teaching Geography*, January 1997 matching river and valley features and an OS map
- Matching labels to features: e.g. to features shown on map or terms/descriptions

Categorising or classifying

Students can be asked to categorise or classify features and factors – including benefits versus problems. The information can be on cards. Students can be given categories or asked to devise their own and the latter is a good group activity to encourage discussion. It can be used in either retrieval or independent practice.

Reading

- Nash, P. 'Card sorting activities in the geography classroom', *Teaching Geography*, January 1997 (example of farmers' decision about what crops to grow and how to grow them.)
- Thomas, S. and McGahan, H. 'Geography it makes you think', *Teaching Geography*, July 1997 (a decision-making example where statements have to be categorised into those that are background information and those that are triggers for decision-making).

Odd one out is an activity to pick the odd one out from a list of words to help students learn the fundamental concept of *classification/categorisation*. It was originally developed as a 'thinking activity' and is a useful retrieval practice activity or can be used when a topic is first taught, when it helps students to see similarities and differences. It is particularly useful to familiarize students with key vocabulary for a topic. The words can be written on cards for groups to discuss, but it can also be a whole-class activity with the words on the board.

The version illustrated in the example at the end of this paper, based on rivers and coasts, requires students not only to identify the odd one out, but to identify the link between the other two. This leads to more discussion between the group than the basic 'odd one 'out'.

Two example Odd one out activities, based on the geography of rivers and coasts, are provided at. A further adapted and updated version of *Odd one out* is described in Cannell, J., Hopkin, J. and Kitchen, B. (2018)

Reading

- Leat, D. (1998) *Thinking through geography*. Cambridge: Chris Kington Publishing
- Cannell, J., Hopkin, J. and Kitchen, B. (2018) [Critical thinking in practice](#), Geographical Association page 28
- Leat's example: river basins and flooding, traffic management, population and migration

Mostly likely to. Students are presented with a list of statements and they have to identify which they think is most likely to represent a situation. The statements can be on cards, or in a jumbled up list. They have to sort them into two groups on the basis that they are *most likely to* conform to the characteristics. In other words this is a classifying activity, but without cast-iron answers! The activity needs to be for a topic where there are viable alternatives and it helps students to look for generalizations and understand patterns and processes at work.

Some hints on managing this activity

- Include some obvious and some ambiguous statements to give some confidence and some challenge.
- Decide if students need to record their decisions – if they do, make the recording simple so it does not distract from the discussion.
- The timing is elastic – it depends on the amount of debate the statements generate.
- Discuss the characteristics and classifications they found in a debrief, and then go on to consider generalisations and any hypotheses they suggested.
- Watch that the tasks do not engender or reinforce stereotypes and prejudices; think carefully about the statement and look out for any points where this might occur. Be prepared to challenge any stereotypes in the debriefing, by asking 'is this the only circumstance where this occurs?'
- It is possible to move from classification to a comparison in some themes.

Reading

- Nichols, A. and Kinninment, D., (2001) *More Thinking through Geography*, London: Chris Kington Publishing; includes examples of: ecotourism or mass tourism, farming in the UK
- Leat, D. and McAleavy, T, 'Critical thinking in the humanities', *Teaching Geography*, July 1998

Ranking

This group activity to rank items from most to least important (or vice versa) can be used in situations where explanation and/or interpretation are related to a number of factors. It can be used as a starter activity or to analyse data.

Diamond ranking is a variation where factors are written on 5 or 9 cards and are sorted through discussion and arranged in a diamond pattern.

Reading

- Nash, P. 'Card sorting activities in the geography classroom', *Teaching Geography*, January 1997 includes ranking preferences in types of holiday.

Sequencing

This group activity can be used where there is change over time. Students are given the information in text, diagram or image and have to decide the steps in the sequence. It allows students to explore different options before they settle on a final version.

Reading

- Norton, A. 'On the cards', *Teaching Geography*, January 1999 includes:
 - a case study of a shipwrecked sequencing activity following a route on a map
 - a case study of the hydrological cycle.

Defining

[*Taboo*](#) is a guessing game used to encourage students to define terms, develop vocabulary and use prior knowledge and understanding.

(Last updated May 2021)

Odd one out: Rivers

(Source: Alan Jeanes at Simon Langton Boys School Canterbury. Staffordshire Learning Net website.)

1. meander	2. long profile	3. cross-profile
4. attrition	5. solution	6. potholes
7. waterfall	8. meander belt	9. river terrace
10. saltation	11. bedload	12. flood plain
13. levee	14. discharge	15. velocity
16. wetted perimeter	17. hydraulic radius	18. V-shaped valley
19. erosion	20. deposition	21. transportation

Instructions

Look at the sets below. The numbers in each set refer to items in the table above.

In each set:

1. circle the odd one out
2. write in the link between the other two items
3. add a fourth number, to match the other two.

Note: There may be more than one correct answer.

Set 1

14	15	18	
What's the link?			

Set 2

4	5	6	
What's the link?			

Set 3

1	12	11	
What's the link?			

Set 4

2	3	7	
What's the link?			

Set 5

20	12	13	
What's the link?			

Set 6

18	1	12	
What's the link?			

Set 7

10	20	21	
What's the link?			

Set 8

16	6	17	
What's the link?			

Set 9

13	19	15	
What's the link?			

Set 10

1	12	2	
What's the link?			

Now make up some of your own

What's the link?			

What's the link?			

What's the link?			

Odd one out: Coasts

(Source: Alison Bowers, Le Bocage International School, Mauritius. Staffordshire Learning Net website.)

1. backwash	2. longshore drift	3. wave
4. hydraulic action	5. beach	6. corrasion
7. headland	8. cave	9. bay
10. deposition	11. swash	12. erosion
13. wave-cut platform	14. corrosion	15. groyne
16. cliff	17. wave-cut notch	18. spit
19. attrition	20. arch	21. stack

Instructions

Look at the sets below. The numbers in each set refer to items in the table above.

In each set:

1. circle the odd one out
2. write in the link between the other two items
3. add a fourth number, to match the other two.

Note: There may be more than one correct answer.

Set 1

4	15	14	
What's the link?			

Set 2

1	21	8	
What's the link?			

Set 3

7	8	12	
What's the link?			

Set 4

15	5	20	
What's the link?			

Set 5

18	21	10	
What's the link?			

Set 6

2	7	16	
What's the link?			

Set 7

3	18	1	
What's the link?			

Now make up some of your own

What's the link?			

What's the link?			

What's the link?			