

Thinking Strategies *for Student Achievement*

IMPROVING
LEARNING
ACROSS THE
CURRICULUM, K-12

DENISE D. NESSEL
JOYCE M. GRAHAM

SECOND EDITION



CORWIN PRESS

A SAGE Publications Company
Thousand Oaks, California



16

Key Word Notes

Overview and Background

Key Word Notes is a strategy for processing information while reading by writing and talking with a partner. The processing aids comprehension and retention, whereas the notes that are generated can be used in writing a summary of the information. The strategy is most appropriate and effective with informational material, although it can also be used when reading fiction or other works of literature.

This strategy was devised by one of the authors when advising a group of middle- and high-school teachers whose students were working on research reports. The teachers were concerned about students copying information directly from their references. They also suspected that the students did not fully understand what they were reading in the reference materials. The proposed solution came to be known as Key Word Notes. Although the strategy has been presented in handout form by the authors in workshops, this is the first time the strategy has been formally published. For more information about the principles of writing as a means of learning, on which this strategy is based, see Robinson (1993) and Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001).

Instructional Benefits of This Strategy

- encourages attentive, active reading
- gives students practice in identifying important details
- provides opportunities for restating information
- encourages students to state and write information in their own words
- enhances retention of information after reading
- builds collaborative-learning skills
- gives students a study strategy they can use on their own

Step by Step

Before being successful with this strategy, students need experience identifying important details when they read informational text, and they need experience listening to and responding directly to a partner. When they are comfortable with these aspects of the process, here is how to proceed:

1. Have students prepare a page in their notebooks that looks like this:

TOPIC: _____

1	2
3	4
5	

2. I

E

n

3. F

n

4. C

R

th

n

a

w

c

a

y

ir

w

n

o

5. V

th

se

B

6. R

7. V

th

th

q

st

Feeling
people
deaths
earth
and cc

2. Divide the text students are about to read into four sections. Each section should be about 200–250 words long, which means it will probably include several paragraphs.
3. Have students write the topic at the top of their papers and note the beginning and end of the first section.
4. Organize students into pairs and give them the directions:

Read the first section to yourself and identify three or four words that you think will help you remember the most important information in that section. You may choose any words you like as long as you think they will help you remember the information. Write the words you choose in Box 1. When you and your partner have each chosen your words, take turns explaining what words you chose and what information they will help you remember. You may keep your books open as you talk and may refer to the text if you wish.

Limiting students to so few words keeps them from copying the text word for word. Also, because the task is to select words that will help them remember the information, they are more likely to think about the information as they read instead of reading quickly and inattentively.

5. When students have finished discussing their word choices for the first section, tell the class the ending point for the second section and have them read, select key words, write them in Box 2, and talk in pairs about their choices.
6. Repeat the process for the third and fourth sections of the text.
7. When students have finished reading all four sections, have them put the book aside and individually write about what they learned in Box 5, using all of their selected key words.

Here is an example of a reading selection about earthquakes and the beginning of a Key Word Notes page that one student created to help her remember what she read:

Feeling the ground move in an earthquake can be scary, but people are seldom hurt by the shaking. Instead, most injuries and deaths are caused by things that fall, break, or collapse when the earth moves. For example, windows may pop out of buildings and come crashing to the ground with great force. Brickwork in

chimneys and on walls is easily weakened in a quake, and when the bricks pull away from one another and fall, they can injure people below. Large rocks on hillsides can also be dislodged in an earthquake and can tumble down onto houses, cars, and people without warning. Heavy tree limbs, too, may break off and fall, crushing property and injuring people.

Bridges, roads, and railway tracks can also be twisted and cracked in an earthquake. For instance, in the 1989 San Francisco quake, some highway overpasses buckled so badly that they had to be torn down. The roadway on one bridge gave way completely, leaving a gaping hole in the bridge high above the water of San Francisco Bay. Tunnels can also be dangerous places during an earthquake. No matter how well built a tunnel is, the walls may crack or collapse if the earth around it is jolted enough.

TOPIC: Earthquake Damage

1 not shaking break collapse	2 roads bridges tunnels dangerous
3	4
5	

Additional Suggestions

- At first, as students are learning the strategy, it's best to have them read short sections and choose only three or four words. As they become more adept with the process, you may wish to increase the

e, and when
y can injure
lodged in an
and people
off and fall,

twisted and
an Francisco
at they had
e way come
re the water
places dur-
is, the walls
nough.

length of the sections and also the number of key words students will select.

- If students do not catch on to the process, model for them by reading the sections with them, selecting your own key words, and sharing with the class which words you chose and why. You may also want to model how to write a summary of the information using all of the words you chose.
- You may wish to vary the number of sections, depending on the way the text is structured. For example, students might read only three sections before using their key words to write a summary, or they may read more than four sections.
- Encourage students to use this strategy on their own as they engage in research for reports or as they study content-area texts. They can pair up with a friend or they can simply pause periodically when they read, select words to help them remember the information, and summarize their learning in writing at the end.

o have them
rds. As they
increase the