

GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Graphic organizers (GO) are easily adaptable instructional tools that have applications across academic content areas for use by students with and without disabilities. These curricular resources support students to demonstrate higher level thinking skills (e.g., cause and effect, compare and contrast, sequencing, analyzing) that are aligned to the complexity within grade level academic standards. For example, GO can help students focus their thoughts for planning, decision making, and writing. They can also aid students in seeing connections, patterns, and relationships. This TIPS in Action focuses on using principles of Universal Design for Learning to plan, implement, and evaluate the use of GO in a manner that removes barriers and enables students with significant cognitive disabilities to meaningfully participate in academic instruction in inclusive classrooms.

Benefits for students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

- Fortifies reading comprehension by students across content areas
- Provides a way for students to demonstrate higher level thinking skills
- Supports communication of student thinking

Planning

1. Determine the goal for the lesson and type of GO to best address the content within the goal.
2. Identify barriers and brainstorm solutions within planning for all students. Ensure that any adaptations do not take away from the original purpose of the GO and promote student independence as much as possible.
3. Determine what supports are needed to prepare for the students' completion and use of the GO (e.g., visual supports, peer training, pre-teaching) within the lesson.
4. Use solutions developed during planning to create adapted GO.
5. Determine what materials are needed to create adapted GO.

In Action: Implementation

1. Pre-teach and model any unfamiliar graphic organizers
2. Implement the lesson using graphic organizer
3. Collect data on student performance
4. Be responsive to student performance for necessary adaptations during instruction (e.g., adjust response options based on student engagement with graphic organizer)

Evaluation

Determine whether the support(s) provided met the needs of the student by considering the following:

- Did the students understand what to do?
- Were the students able to complete the GO independently?
- Did the students have a way to communicate their thoughts and ideas to each other and to the class?

GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS: TROUBLESHOOTING

**The ideas presented are examples of ways to apply principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL; <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>) and are not intended to be comprehensive.

If there is a barrier to student engagement in completing the graphic organizer (GO), you can:

- Involve students in the learning process by incorporating student interest into the GO.
- Offer flexibility in how students complete their GO, such as incorporating technology or building a permanent product.
- Partner students to collaborate and share their ideas on completed organizers.

If there is a barrier to student understanding when completing the GO, you can:

- Offer multiple ways for students to understand the task and lesson, such as modeling how to complete a GO using a student's AAC device or by sorting words/pictures/objects while giving examples/non examples.
- Support vocabulary use such as work with the special education team to provide some pre-teaching on relevant vocabulary and to create word banks with visual supports.
- Highlight or color code the sections of the organizer to support student understanding of the relationship and differences.

If there is a barrier to student(s) expressing their ideas when completing the GO, you can

- Encourage flexible forms of communication (e.g., access to software sentence systems, AAC, choice boards, word prediction software)
- Reduce demands on working memory to manage information by providing all of the information on the GO or by providing pre-cut words to sort.
- Build fluency with the organizer by practicing with previously learned content.

Figure 1. Example of adapted graphic organizer



For a planning worksheet, please refer to the [TIPS in Action Planning Worksheet](#).

For additional information on using GO in general education classes, please see the full [Graphic Organizers TIPS](#).