Graphic Organizers for Comprehension

Graphic organizers have been a part of presenting new concepts to students for years. The question arises, why aren’t more teachers integrating them into their lessons? Research supports their benefit, particularly for students with Learning Disabilities. “All of the studies we evaluated showed a large positive effect of graphic organizers on post-test performance of students with LD” (Hughes and colleagues, Douglas Dexter, 2011).

Perhaps the prevalence of use is linked to the fact that teachers don’t know exactly how and when to use them. Familiar with **Power Point**? If yes, this is a great place to start. Follow the steps below to try it out for your next lesson:

1. Open up PP
2. Choose Blank Presentation
3. Click Insert & Smart Art

Once you develop using graphic organizers as a new habit, it will become common practice when planning your lessons. You can also use websites such as Education Place and EDTech Solutions (scroll down to Graphic Organizer section). Modelling the use of graphic organizers on a Smart Board or on a white board will assist in meeting the needs of the variety of learning styles, not to mention making learning easiest for students with Learning Disabilities. Ultimately, “To be effective, especially for students with special needs, there are three general principles that emerge from the research and practice. Graphic Organizers must be used **consistently, coherently and creatively.**” (Baxendell, 2013. Council for Exceptional Children).

“It is clear that graphic organizers may greatly assist students with Learning Disabilities in the following four areas: (see graphic organizer below)...” All of which are critical to the development of comprehension skills.
How can teachers integrate graphic organizers into their lessons with ease?

The following three examples that highlight the use of graphic organizers in different grade levels while at the same time, focusing on one of the four areas shown in the graphic organizer above.

Here is an example of **drawing differences**. This graphic organizer assists a student with understanding the difference within a place value chart.

Here is a sample story map by a Grade 7 student with dysgraphia. It helps to keep his ideas organized and in order while simultaneously **identifying main ideas and supporting details** from a story they read.
For older students, Learn Alberta has several downloadable graphic organizer templates. When you click on each organizer, it will give you a sample of how it has been used to increase understanding of the same information written in multiple choice format.

In this short video, Ashley Barber (gr 7 – 12 science teacher at Foothills Academy) explains how she integrates a Concept Sheet Graphic Organizers into her classroom. The objective is for students to connect new material (concepts) with prior knowledge. These Concepts Sheets are also a fantastic tool to

Judy Willis, neurologist and author, decided to become a teacher so she could integrate her research-based practices. You can read about her experience in her book, Teaching the Brain to Read: Strategies for Improving Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension. On March 8, 2016, Foothills Academy’s Tanya Keto will be presenting a Webinar called Who’s in Charge? that is being offered by the Calgary Regional Consortium. This Webinar will focus on Judy Willis’ work (with her permission) on how to build executive function skills. Tanya will share many strategies to integrate into the classroom to improve your student’s comprehension by using graphic organizers and many other tools.