

Section 16: Building Literacy and Essential Skills into Daily Life: Strategy 8: KWL

Handout 14: Sample KWL framework

The KWL strategy can be useful to you in your work with learners. It helps you understand what they know, and what they would like to know more about. Engaging your learners in this discussion using the KWL framework can help you make your lessons more relevant. The final component – what I learned – can help you to evaluate the effectiveness of your learning activity.

You can also use this strategy to talk about things you encounter in your day with your learner. You can talk out loud about the things you want to know about, and how or where you might find that information. Activities such as this encourage active thinking (as opposed to being a passive learner) and continuous learning skills. It also promotes self-monitoring, wherein the learner becomes aware of what they know, asks questions about what they want to know, and thinks about where/how they could find the answers.

Another way to use the KWL strategy with your learner is to ask them if there is a topic they would like to know more about, or notice what things interest them (e.g. nature, space travel, hockey, cooking) and structure your lessons around those interests.

Below is an example of how to use the framework with a simple question, “How do astronauts sleep in zero gravity?”

What I know	What I want to know	What I learned
I heard that there is an international space station and astronauts live there for months at a time doing experiments.	How do astronauts sleep in zero gravity? Do they float around bumping into things? [Ask the learner questions such as, “Where would I find the answer to this question?” Talk about the library or Google or a book by Chris Hadfield who is a famous Canadian astronaut that lived on the space station.]	I looked it up in Chris Hadfield’s book and found out that astronauts don’t need pillows or blankets because they float away. Astronauts sleep in hooded sleeping bags like cocoons with armholes for their arms to hang out. They are tethered to the inside of the space station so they don’t float all over the place.

You can also add an additional column to the framework to ask “Where to find what I want to know” and brainstorm with the learner about where to find this information (e.g., at the library).