

Knowledge Grids

Another really useful way to pre-assess what learners already know is to use a knowledge grid. In the example below, a Year7 science teacher wants to find out, before she starts teaching the module, how much learners already know about global warming. She gives each learner a copy of the grid and asks them to spend five minutes completing it in silence. She does this towards the end of a lesson about a week or so before she starts the new module. This gives her time to assess the results and decide the best starting points for each different learner.






Name:-	
Definition	Examples
Causes	Effects

Global Warming

You can download this template from <http://osiriseducational.co.uk/TB/resources>

Analysing the grids enables this teacher to build an accurate understanding of every learner's starting point in each of the four areas.

There are two important reasons why it's more effective to get learners to write about what they know in this way than a tick list such as the example given below. Firstly, a tick list is likely to tell you more about the learners' over- or under- inflated view of their knowledge and understanding than anything else. Secondly, a checklist like this does nothing more than ask a non-expert to self-assess their level of expertise. Not a great idea! Furthermore, the task is very vague: there are no criteria against which the learners can accurately measure anything. A proper pre-assessment activity gives concrete feedback, measurement against clear criteria, and leaves the choice of starting points under the jurisdiction of the expert: the teacher.

	Don't know	Have some understanding	Confidently understand
Causes of global warming			
Understand the advantages and disadvantages of alternative sources of energy			
Understand how building design can impact on global warming			
Understand the different gases that contribute to global warming			
Ways governments seek to reduce the impact of global warming			

3. Assessing Contextual Awareness

It's often important for teachers of literature, history, social studies, and certain other subjects to make sure their learners have a good grounding in the cultural, social, economic, and historical events of the time. An appreciation of the social, political, and economic trends that created the conditions for the Russian Revolution is essential; just as a similar understanding of 1920s America is necessary to fully appreciate and evaluate F Scott Fitzgerald's novel, 'The Great Gatsby.'

Pre-assessment of such issues gives teachers critically useful insights into what are the necessary starting points for their learners before embarking on the work.

Teacher of English, Laura McQueen, used the grid below to assess her class before starting a module on Shakespeare's Macbeth. The feedback she obtained clearly showed that she needed to devote more lesson time than she'd expected on de-mystifying Shakespearean language. The feedback made it abundantly obvious that this was the key area in which her class lacked confidence and would slow their learning down if it were not addressed at the outset.

Name	
What do you know already about Macbeth?	What do you know about the period of history?
What other Shakespeare plays have you learnt about or read?	What has been your experience of Shakespearean language?

Structured Observations

This pre-assessment strategy is really helpful where future learning requires the proficient use of a *particular skill*.

Such skills might include essay writing, using a tool in a Technology lesson, setting up a fair test for an experiment in Science, reading for gist in Modern Foreign Languages, summarising a piece of text after skimming and scanning, breaking down a Maths problem into parts, or applying a technique in a performance context such as sport, physical education, or drama. Setting learners a concrete challenge, so they can demonstrate their level of competence in the skill in question, gives the teacher immediate feedback about where the learners need to start from. Where learners already have high competence in the skill the level of challenge can be raised. Where competence is lacking, the feedback shows what gaps need to be closed and what scaffolding for learning needs to be provided. Above all, it challenges any false assumptions the teacher might be holding.



Stuart, a PE teacher, told us how he'd used a structured observation to help his class get to grips with their own starting points. He'd found that they were reluctant to work on drills to improve different aspects of their footballing skills. Instead they just wanted to go straight into matches during his PE classes. They were suffering from what he described as 'Messi syndrome'. They thought they were fantastic, but having watched them play Stuart knew differently. So he set up a challenge where he had the class pass the ball between two cones placed close together. None of the class could do it. As a consequence they saw that there was a point to working on skill development. After all, with passing skills at such a low level, they wouldn't be requiring an agent for a while!

KWI

For teachers who follow a thematic curriculum, KWI is an excellent tool for pre-assessing learners. This pre-assessment tool came from Diane Heacox's book 'Making Differentiation a Habit'. KWI is a set of questions that learners answer before they start a new module of learning: What do you **Know** about? What do you **Want** to know about? What are you **Interested** in learning about? The teacher provides a KWI handout (see below) for each learner to fill out. The teacher can then use the results to adjust their teaching to cover aspects of the topic that their class express curiosity about.

Name:-		
What I know already?	What I want to know about? (Questions I have)	What I am interested in learning about?

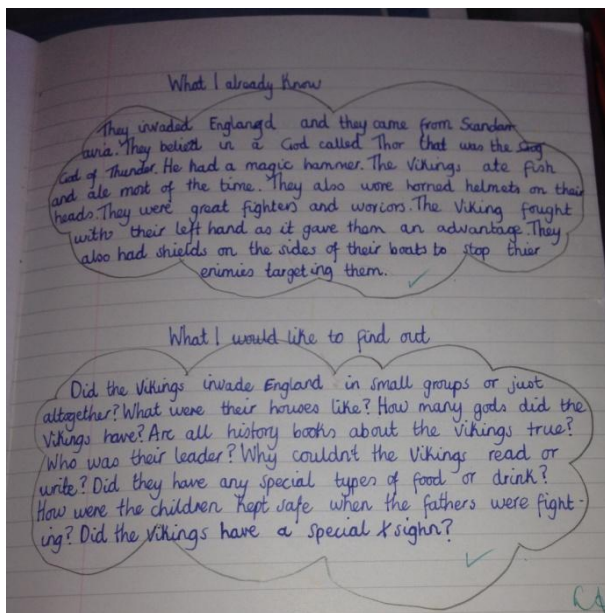
To download this template – <http://osiriseducational.co.uk/TB/resources>

The “K” part of KWI enables the teacher to pre-assess what learners already know about a topic or theme. It also enables them to gather any misconceptions that learners may have about the forthcoming topic.

The “W” part helps the teacher draw up a list of questions the class would like to investigate as part of their learning.

The “I” part identifies the aspects of the topic that learners are most curious about.

When ‘outstanding’ primary teacher, Alison Martin, conducted a KWI activity she discovered she had an expert on Ancient Egypt in her class. From the feedback the KWI gave her, she realised that this student probably knew more than she did and would likely be bored rigid over the next few weeks if she set him the same tasks as the others. So she set this learner an individual challenge comparing the Ancient Egyptians with the Mayans.



Worcesters Primary School, Enfield. Source: Alison Martin



Try using a KWI just before a weekend or school holiday. You never know what learners might come back with. A KWI activity can act as a spur for learners to start investigating on their own initiative. One primary teacher returned on Monday morning to find her Year 1 class had spent the entire weekend collecting information on the life cycle of butterflies. One boy even brought in a plant covered in caterpillars in his school bag!



Which of the pre-assessment tools above could help you to more accurately establish your learners' starting points?

How might you adapt these tools to make them work effectively with your classes?

What advantages can you see from spending a little more time setting up accurate pre-assessment activities?

How will this influence your planning for future learning?

What knowledge and skills gaps are you now more aware of in your learners? How do you propose to get your learners to set about closing those gaps?