

Knowledge Organisers

What is a knowledge organiser, and what should it include?

A knowledge organiser is a document, usually 1 side of A4, that contains key facts and information that children need to have a basic knowledge and understanding of a topic. Knowledge organisers help children gain specific knowledge in each curriculum subject that builds up over time, we want this knowledge to be part of their long term memory. It is also useful for teachers; as Mary Myatt explains in her book, *The Curriculum: Gallimaufry to Coherence*: 'The real power of knowledge organisers is that they make us think hard about what we are going to teach.'

Most knowledge organisers will include:

- The learning journey – objectives to be taught and learnt
- Prior learning from any stage in the same subject
- Essential facts about the topic, usually laid out in easily digestible chunks
- Key vocabulary or technical terms and their meanings
- Images such as maps or diagrams
- Famous quotations, if relevant
- 10 questions on the reverse for assessment purposes.

What a knowledge organiser includes will depend on the subject. For example, a 'Second World War' knowledge organiser and a 'Rivers' knowledge organiser would both include maps, but the former would also include a timeline, and the latter would need diagrams.

Material should also be presented in such a way that it can be easily tested, to maximise the opportunity for retrieval practice.

How we use them in the classroom?

1. Give the knowledge organiser to the children before the start of a topic to encourage discussion and prior research. Send a copy home.
2. Talk through the knowledge organiser at the beginning of the topic, asking the children what information has sparked their interest, and if they have any questions.
3. Talk about the meaning of the vocabulary.
4. Use the knowledge organiser as a regular retrieval tool. Mix up practice using short, low stakes quizzes, games, partner discussion, filling in a blank (or partially blank) knowledge organiser and so on, rather than constant formal testing. Do the children know more than is included on the knowledge organiser? Ask higher-level 'why' questions to stretch the children's understanding and add detail. Regular retrieval practice is important, because active retrieval aids later retention (Roediger et al., 2011).
5. Use the knowledge organiser to identify knowledge gaps throughout the topic and to assess what has been learnt at the end.
6. Display an enlarged copy of the knowledge organiser on a working wall, encouraging children to add information around it during the topic.
7. Use knowledge organisers to strengthen teacher knowledge in a subject area.
8. Glue the knowledge organisers into the children's topic books for regular reference.

9. Make links between knowledge organisers to help children understand how their learning connects. For example, remind the children of a previous year's knowledge organiser and discuss how their new knowledge links and builds upon it.
10. Use the knowledge organiser as a handy spelling and vocabulary reminder. Keep it visible at all times and expect the children to use the proper vocabulary correctly.
11. Use the knowledge organisers as guided reading texts. This way, you can help children read the information and check they understand it.
12. Use them to do some pre-teaching for children with SEND.

How will they help our children and teachers?

Knowledge organisers give children and teachers the 'bigger picture' of a topic or subject area. Some topics can be complicated, so having the essential knowledge, clear diagrams, explanations and key terms on one document can be really helpful.

Research shows that our brains remember things more efficiently when we know the 'bigger picture' and can see the way that nuggets of knowledge within that subject area link, forming schemata. Making links, essentially, helps information move into our long-term memory. And, as Sean Harford recently remarked, knowledge becomes 'sticky' – the more you know, the more you learn – which helps children gain deeper understanding over time.

Another key benefit is their use for retrieval practice. Regular retrieval of knowledge helps us remember more effectively (Roediger et al, 2011). Again, it helps us store knowledge in, and recall it from, the long-term memory and frees up space in the working memory to take on new knowledge (Hirsch, *Why Knowledge Matters* (2016)).

The other benefit is that they make the knowledge explicit. So, even if a child misses a lesson, they have a constant point of reference. They give a class a 'level playing field' of knowledge, with more children having a general awareness and set of knowledge about a topic, rather than just a handful of children who did hours of research over half term!

For a teacher, the knowledge organiser supports or directs what you're teaching in each lesson. You can shape your teaching around it to ensure that you cover the key information over a sequence of lessons and that you assess knowledge-based outcomes based on it. As mentioned before, I think it helps teachers work out the overarching themes of a topic and the pared-down essential knowledge they want children to learn.