



# Categorisation

Categorisation facilitates the storage and retrieval of information as it helps students to organise information and store it efficiently in their memory (Bornstein & Arterberry, 2010). Categorisation skills underpin students' cognition as well as memory and language (Mareschal, Powell, & Volein, 2003). As such, having good categorisation skills will assist students in organising and expanding their vocabulary and consolidating word knowledge.

**Keywords:** *categorisation, cognition, language, semantics, vocabulary*

Categorisation is a process that spans across students' development, where students organise and connect things that are similar together. For example, knowing that 'cat' and 'dog' are both in the category of animals. When used to learn vocabulary, categorisation falls under the broader term of 'semantics', as outlined in the SALDA *Semantics* handout. The use of learning and using categories is helpful in enhancing long term memory as it aids in describing related words, improving students' understanding of the association of words and promoting expressive vocabulary use.

## **Examples of Categories:**

- Animals (Dog, horse, cow)
- Colour (Red, blue, green)
- Emotions (Happy, sad, angry)
- Food (Egg, meat, fish)
- Shapes (Rectangle, circle, diamond)
- Vehicles (Car, train, bus)
- Cuisines (French, Italian, Japanese)
- Famous Landmarks (Eiffel Tower, Statue of Liberty, Sydney Opera House)
- Things that fly (Plane, bird, balloon)

## **Strategies/ Activities for Teaching Categorisation:**

### 1. Sorting

- Practice sorting pictures into simple categories. Start with two basic categories such as food and clothes. Once the student can do this consistently and confidently, include more categories such as animals, transport and furniture. Eventually move to more specific sub-categories such as Australian animals, farm animals, sea animals etc.
- Pictures can be found by searching Google Images or by cutting them out from magazines, newspapers or catalogues. Actual objects can also be used.



## 2. Identifying Category Items

- Present the student with a selection of pictures to identify category items. For example, show the student three pictures of different categories and ask, “Which is a reptile?”. Then, increase the difficulty by increasing the number of pictures and asking students to identify two or more members. For example, “Show me two reptiles”.

## 3. Describing Categories

- Talk about how members of the same category are similar as well as how they are different to members of other categories (e.g. “This is a cake and this is a burger- they are both foods, we can eat them. Can we eat a chair? No!”).
- Point out and talk about categories throughout the day. For example, at lunch time if student is eating an apple, say, “You are eating an apple, that’s a fruit” or, when students are putting their hats on, say, “You are putting your hat on, a hat is a type of clothing.”

## 4. Creating a Language Scrapbook

- Create a language scrapbook by collecting pictures from newspapers, ‘junk mail’, shopping catalogues, and websites. Sort the pictures into categories and paste items belonging to that category onto one page (e.g. fruit – glue in pictures of apples, oranges, bananas, etc.; transport – glue in pictures of trains, trucks, cars, etc.). Continue to update and review the scrapbook as new vocabulary is encountered.

## 5. Generating Category Members

- Once the student is able to sort items into categories, extend the activity by asking the student to generate category members (e.g., naming as many types of fruit as possible).

## 6. Categorising Words into their Multiple Different Categories

- Another extension task is to discuss the way in which items can belong to multiple different categories. For example, a helicopter can be categorised into “transport”, “flying things”, “noisy things”, etc.

## 7. Generating definition or description

- Ask the student to give a definition or description. For example, asking, “What is food?” The student can give the answer, “It is what people eat to keep them alive.”

## 8. Odd-one-out tasks

- Identifying the “odd one out” is another higher-level category task. Show the student a group of 3 to 5 pictures, with all but one picture having a semantic association (e.g., apple, banana, drum). Ask the student to identify which item is the “odd one out” and provide an explanation for his/her choice (e.g., “the drum is the odd one out because an apple and a banana are both fruit, but the drum is a musical instrument”).



## 9. Use of Visual/ Word Maps

- Visual maps or word maps/ webs can also be used to help increase the semantic associations among the words around a specific topic. This is particularly useful for unfamiliar or complex vocabulary.

### Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or [hello@languagedisorder.org.au](mailto:hello@languagedisorder.org.au)

Website: [languagedisorder.org.au](http://languagedisorder.org.au)

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