

Table of Contents

Introduction	End-of-Class Reflection	89
What Is Writing?	Reader-Response Writing Chart	92
Motivating Students to Write.	Journal Writing	
The Writing Process	Journal Writing Overview	96
Writing Across the Curriculum.	Vocabulary Journal	99
Writing Instruction	Dialogue Journal	103
How to Use This Book	Highlighted Journal.	106
Correlation to Standards	Key Phrase Journal	109
	Double-Entry Journal	112
Part 1: Writing to Learn	Critical Incident Journal	116
Developing Vocabulary	Three-Part Journal	119
Developing Vocabulary Overview.	Note-Taking	
Word Wall	Note-Taking Overview	123
Frayer Model	Cornell Note-Taking System	125
Concept of Definition Map	Note-Taking System for Learning	129
List-Group-Label.	T-List.	133
Vocabulary Self-Collection	Using Diagrams and Maps	
Possible Sentences.	Using Diagrams and Maps Overview	137
Word Trails	Frame	140
	Venn Diagram	143
Previewing and Reviewing	Triangular Venn Diagram	147
Previewing and Reviewing Overview	Cause-and-Effect Map.	151
KWL Chart	Semantic Word Map	155
Think Sheet.	Concept Map.	159
Free-Association Brainstorming	Problem-Solution Map.	162
Probable Passages	Time Order Map	168
Guided Free Write.		

Table of Contents *(cont.)*

Part 2: Writing to Apply

Authoring

Authoring Overview	173
Guided Writing Procedure	175
Reading-Writing Workbench	178
Author’s Chair	182
Read, Encode, Annotate, Ponder	186

Summarizing

Summarizing Overview	191
GIST	193
Key Words	197
Guided Reading and Summarizing Procedure	199

Applying Knowledge

Applying Knowledge Overview	204
Summary-Writing Microtheme	208
Thesis-Support Microtheme	210
Data-Provided Microtheme	212
Quandary-Posing Microtheme	214
RAFT Assignment	216
Business Letter	218
Friendly Letter	220
Data Report	222
Newspaper Article	224
Mathematics Fiction Story	226
Research Report	228

Part 3: Assessing Writing

Assessing Writing

Assessing Writing Overview	230
Holistic Assessment	233
Analytic Assessment	235
Primary Trait Assessment	237
Self-Assessment	239
Peer Assessment	242
Teacher Conference	244

Appendix A: Additional Resources	246
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Appendix B: References Cited	247
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Appendix C: Suggestions for Further Reading	253
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Appendix D: Contents of the Digital Resource CD	254
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Word Trails

Background Information

A strong relationship exists between word knowledge and reading comprehension. Without word knowledge, readers read less and are more apt to be poor readers (Anderson and Freebody 1985). Seldom do words stand alone, isolated from and unrelated to other words. The Word Trails strategy helps students build connections or “trails” from unknown words to familiar ones so they can ultimately acquire and use accurately academic and domain-specific vocabulary. This strategy asks that students gather relevant information about the word of study by looking to print and digital resources for more information. Students need to have a repertoire of strategies to use when they face unknown words in their reading. The Word Trails strategy offers a way to build those bridges.

Grade Levels/Standards Addressed

See page 33 for the standards this strategy addresses, or refer to the Digital Resource CD (standards.pdf) to read the correlating standards in their entirety.

Genre

Expository

Stage of Writing Process

Prewrite

Activity

Introduce a new domain-specific word and then build “trails” and connections from other words to the new word. Have students use both print and digital resources to locate and connect relevant information about the word.

The following are the main trails that connect words:

- **root words**—Many mathematics words have similar root words. Knowing these can help students determine meaning.
- **prefixes and suffixes**—Recognizing and identifying prefixes or suffixes in a word can help determine its meaning.
- **synonyms or similar words**—Words become “friends” and can help students remember definitions. What are other words that have the same or similar meaning to the new word? What are examples of this word?
- **antonyms**—Identifying opposites is an effective way to clarify word meaning. What are the words that mean the opposite of this new word? What are nonexamples of the word?

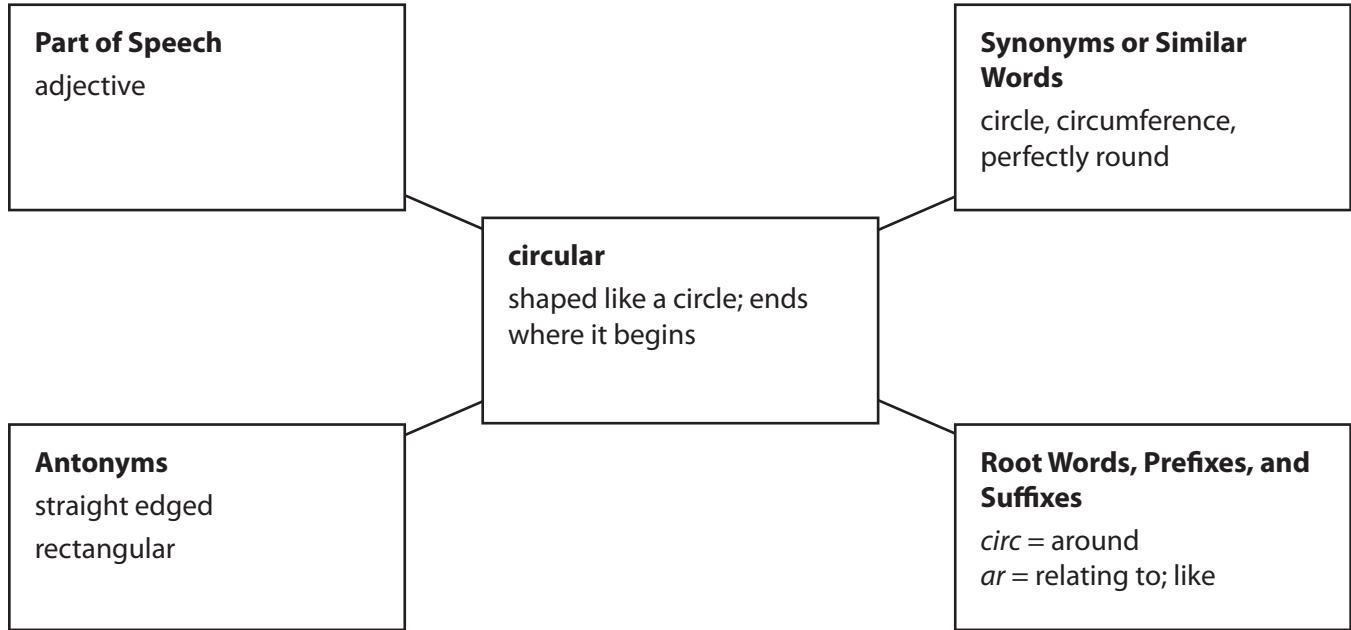
Distribute the *Word Trails* activity sheet (page 62, wordtrails.pdf), and have students identify the trails from this word to other words. When finished, discuss students’ findings. Primary grade teachers may want to complete the *Word Trails* activity sheet as a class, and then post it on the Word Wall (pages 34–38). Students can add these words and their trails to their Vocabulary Journal (pages 99–102).

Differentiation

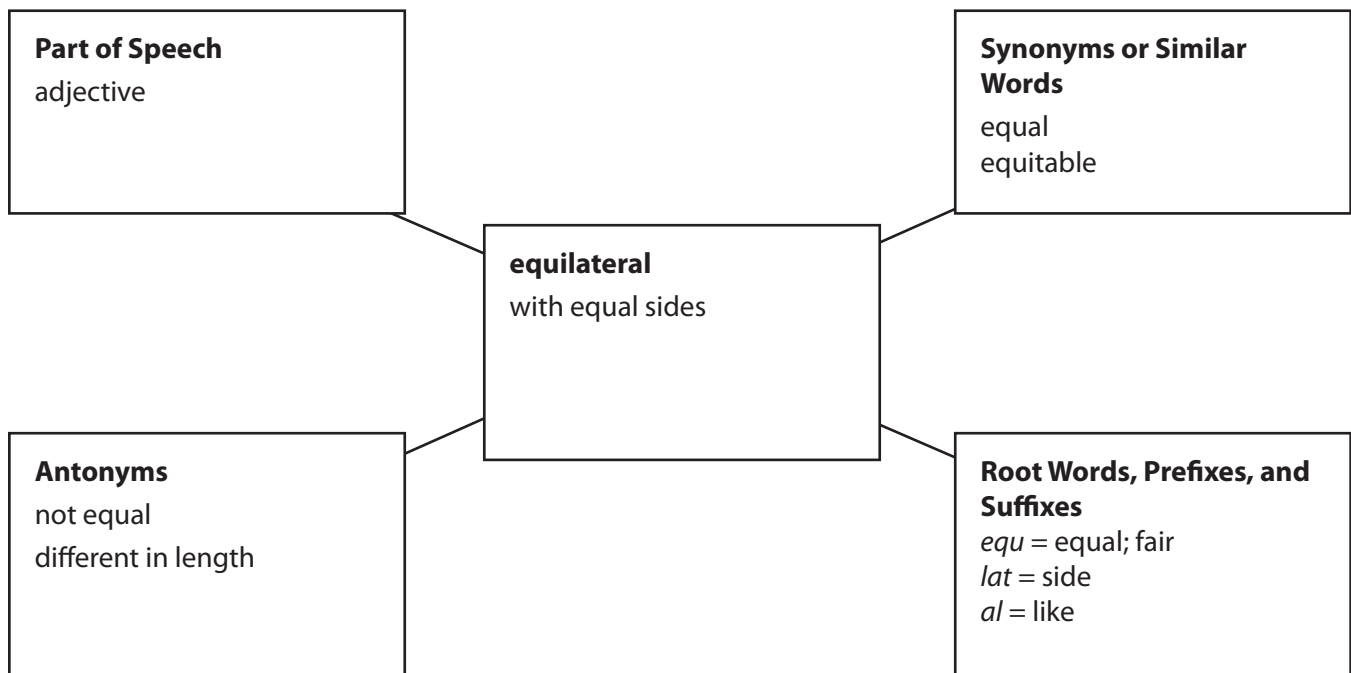
Preteach English language learners how to use the *Word Trails* activity sheet so they understand the format. Consider also preteaching the roots, prefixes, and suffixes that will be addressed during the whole-class lesson so these students will be able to recognize them and apply meaning to the unknown vocabulary word. Use visuals whenever possible. Encourage above-level students to study additional or related vocabulary words and present and explain their maps to the class. Limit the number of vocabulary words for below-level students to allow them to focus on a few words.

Word Trails (cont.)

Grades 3–5 Example



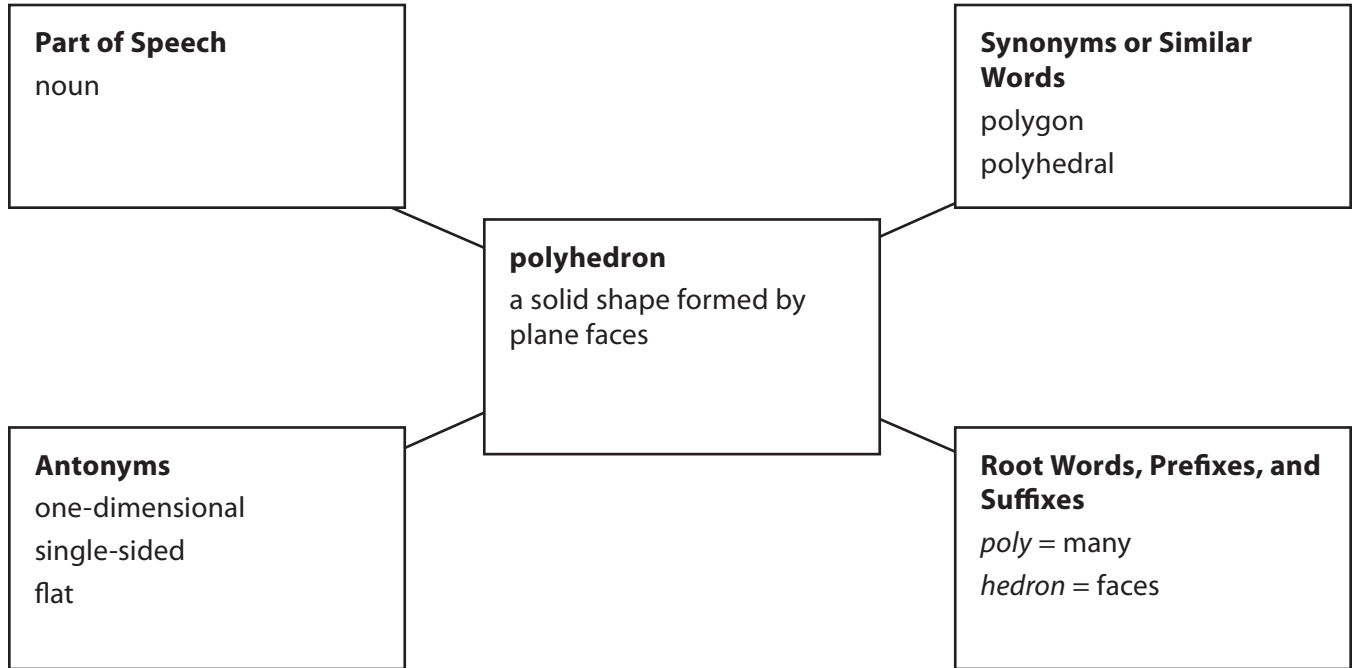
Grades 6–8 Example



Word Trails *(cont.)*

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Grades 9–12 Example



Name: _____ Date: _____

Word Trails

Directions: Write the word that you are studying in the center box. Use resources to determine the root words, prefixes and suffixes, synonyms or similar words, and antonyms. Then, complete the graphic organizer.

