# Parent's Corner

*By Melinda Matthews,*

*SPELD NSW Referral Officer*

## Graphic Organisers

### What are they?

**Graphic organisers are visual aids to identify and sort information.**

They help students learn more effectively by organising information into a visual format.  Organisers can be utilised for note taking, summarising and coming up with new ideas.  For students who have difficulties learning this visual representation helps sort, group, show relationships and connections between the information.

Visual learners learn best when they 'see' the information.  By combining different colours, symbols, lines, and pictures with minimal words, the visual learner can make sense of the information.  They can also remember the patterns and shapes created, thereby making it easier to remember the information.

Graphic organisers allow students to quickly learn and understand information.  It allows tasks to be broken down into manageable chunks so the students are not overwhelmed or risk forgetting key information and connections.

Graphic organisers are also known as mind maps, concept mapping, spray diagrams and spider diagrams.

### How can they be used?

Graphic organisers can be used in the following ways:

- **Brainstorming for generating new ideas**
  Writing ideas onto separate pieces of paper allows the ideas to be sequenced and arranged later.  Alternatively, the same re-arranging of ideas can be done by typing the information on the computer.  The information can then be printed and cut-up.
- **Summarising information and note taking**
  Graphically presenting key points can help clarify connections that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.
- **Combining information from different sources**
  Several sources of information are easily combined by creating headings and grouping the information accordingly.
- **Clarifying and breaking down complex issues**
  Chunking or breaking information into manageable sizes can help students who are easily overwhelmed when trying to deal with the information as a whole.  Likewise, complicated information can be understood easier if dissected into small parts.

- **Displaying the overall subject arrangement in simple one page format**
  The organiser can be used as a quick reference or reminder of the overall topic with minimal wording.
- **Studying and remembering information**
  Producing a graphic organiser is an effective study strategy to review and understand information as well as being easy to remember in a visual format.
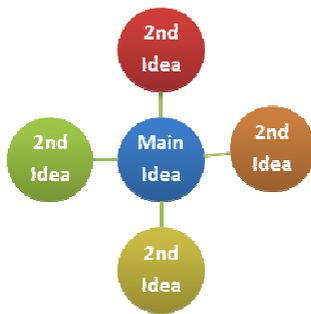
**Types of Graphic Organisers**
Graphic organisers can to be used in different ways.  The type of information and relationships between the groups can determine which organiser best summarises the information.

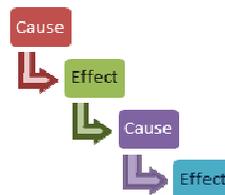Some of the types of organisers that can be uses are:

- **Description Webs**

Main idea with secondary ideas clustered around the main idea.  Example:
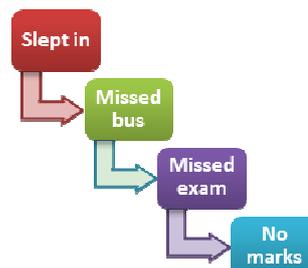


- **Sequence Maps**
  Events occur one at a time in a succession.  These maps can also show cause and effect sequences, where an event produces a result that causes another result causing the flow on effect.  The subsequent effects would not have occurred without the first cause.
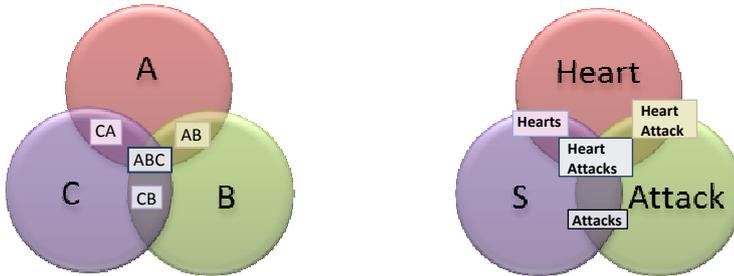


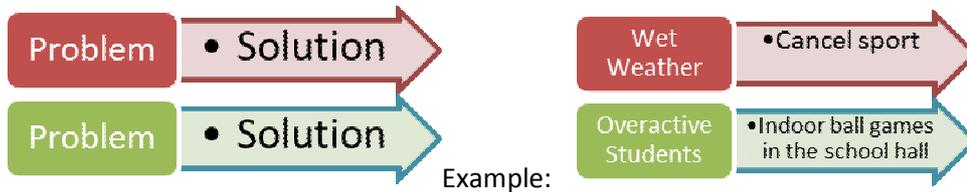Examples:

• **Compare/ Contrast**

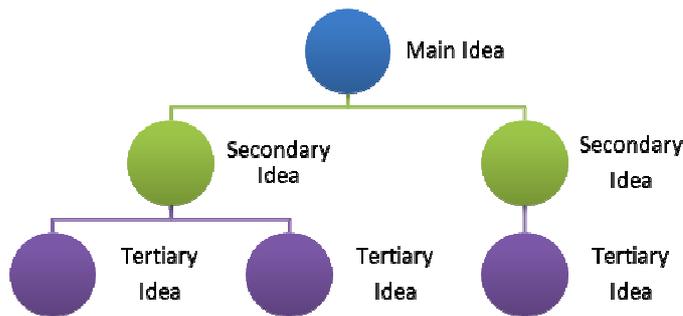Identifies similarities and differences between ideas or events.

Example:



• **Problem/ Solution**

The problem is identified and a solution found to resolve the problem
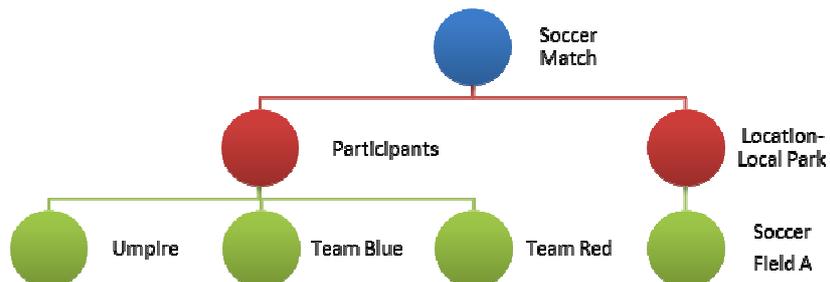


Example:

• **Main Ideas/ Details**

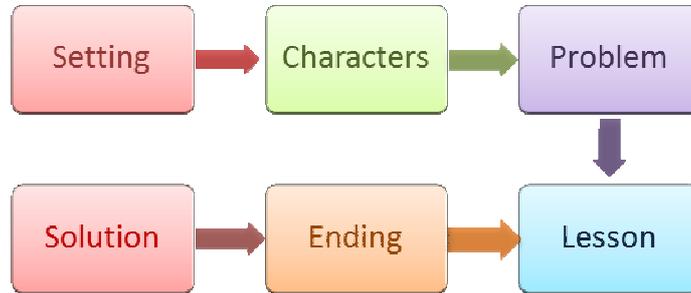Main idea at the top with secondary ideas below, tertiary ideas relate to the secondary ideas and so on.
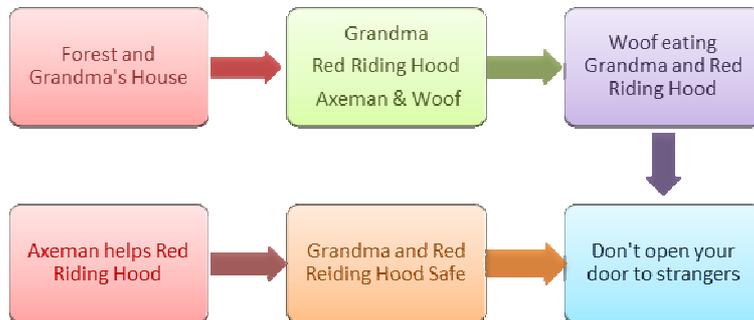


Example:

- **Story Elements**

  Identifying the setting, characters, problems, solution and ending with the lesson learned
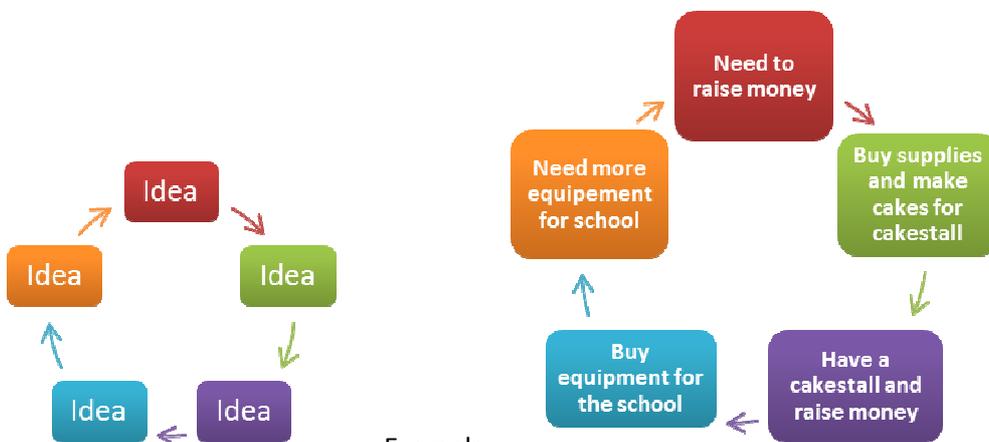
  ```
  Setting  →  Characters  →  Problem
                                 ↓
  Solution  →  Ending  →  Lesson
  ```

Example:

  ```
  Forest and        →  Grandma          →  Woof eating
  Grandma's House      Red Riding Hood      Grandma and Red
                       Axeman & Woof        Riding Hood
                                                 ↓
  Axeman helps Red  →  Grandma and Red   →  Don't open your
  Riding Hood          Reiding Hood Safe     door to strangers
  ```

- **Circular**

  Ideas that follow on to the next idea eventually leading to the start

  ```
        Idea
     Idea    Idea
     Idea    Idea
  ```

  ```
          Need to
         raise money
  Need more          Buy supplies
  equipement         and make
  for school         cakes for
                     cakestall
  Buy                Have a
  equipment for      cakestall and
  the school         raise money
  ```

  Example:

- **Time Lines**

  Shows the chronological progression of events
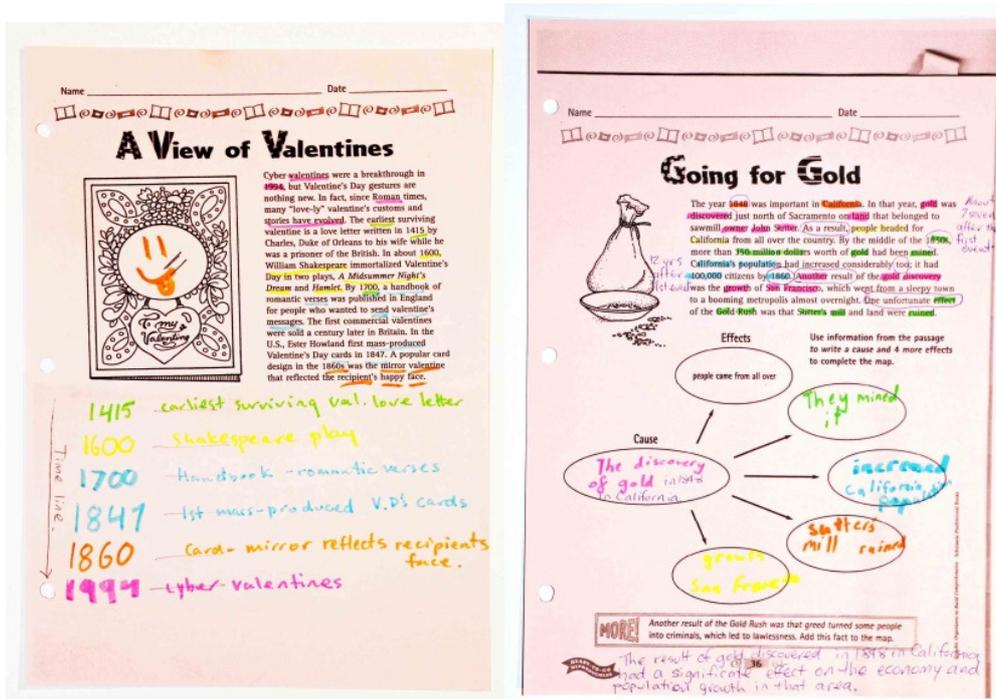

**Ways to make a Graphic Organiser**

A Graphic organiser can be made in a number of ways.
Knowing the relationship between groups makes it easy to determine what organiser to use. If the relationship between ideas is unknown it can be advantageous to write the information on separate pieces of paper, these pieces can be rearrange appropriately to find the connections.

**As a summary Aid:**

- Read the text and highlighting important information. Colour coding is useful when highlighting the text as this can visually sorts information to be graphically organised. If this is too difficult then colour coding can occur after the main points have been identified.
- Write key words on separate pieces of paper. Use capital letters for headings, as they are easy to see.
- Arrange the ideas into a form that shows the relationships and connections between the groups.
- Draw lines to connect the groups. Lines can be drawn as arrows, indicating a flow of information or a time line.
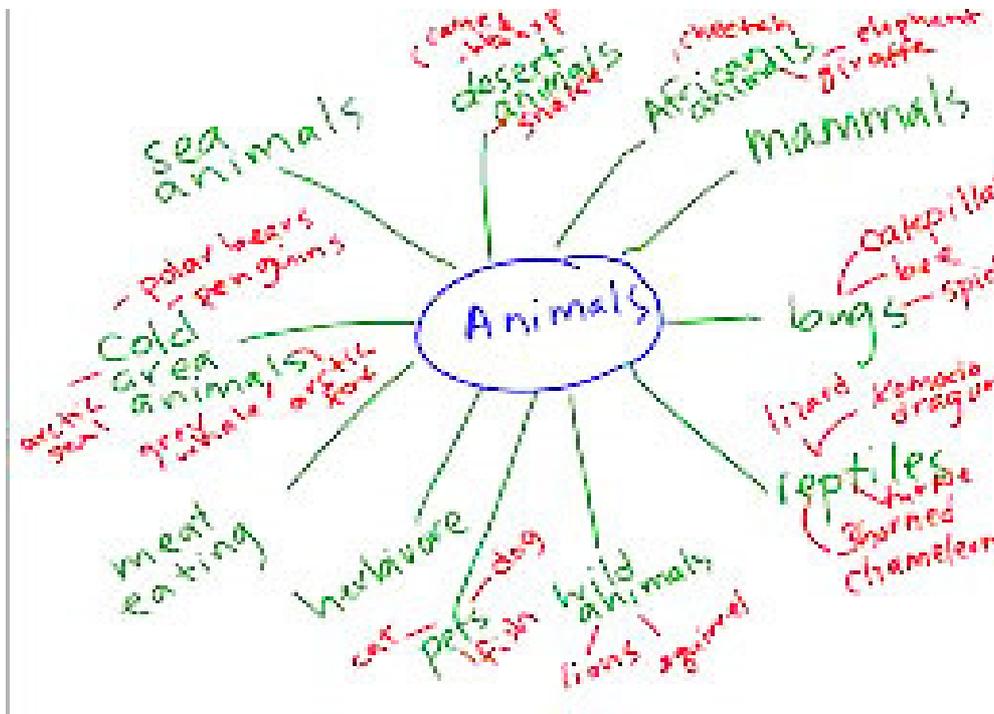


*Examples from Linda Ward Beech's book listed in the References.*

Two examples of graphic organisers used to summarize texts. These examples have used colour coding to highlight main points in the text and then the same colours have been used to put this information down in a graphic organiser format. This allows the student to easily identify the location of the information later.

**As a brainstorming aid:**

- Start at the centre with the main topic.
- Use key words to create other main ideas or topics
- Use lines to connect ideas and topics. Lines should always start from the main topic.

Try using words or sequences of an event to put information down as in the following two examples. Once the information is on paper then it can be rearranged and refined.

*Example of a graphic organiser- Main Idea: Animals with secondary ideas colour codes for clarity*
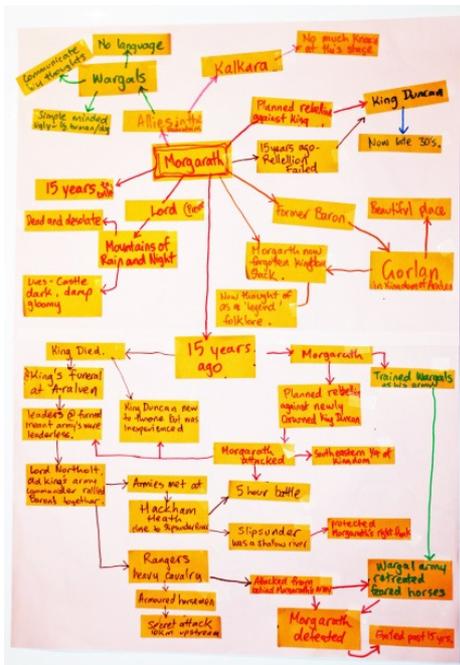
**Remember when using a Graphic Organiser**

Using graphic organisers can be more effective if:

- Use colour either by changing the pen colour or paper colour to differentiate topics.  Not only is it easy to see relationships it is visually more appealing and therefore remembered

- Use symbols and images to enhance the visual connections between words and relationships as they are easier to remember than words

- Use different thickness of lines to indicate the importance between ideas. Thinner lines have less importance than thicker lines and they can help you see the connection between ideas

- Practise creating different types of organisers including by hand, on the computer, or using post-it notes. Using a variety of colours and techniques will develop your own personal style and preference.

- Keep it simple - use enough words or phrases to convey the meaning of ideas, too many words can make the organiser complex and confusing.



These are examples of graphic organisers used to summarise both non-fiction and fiction work. The pink background organiser summaries a fiction story showing the relationship between characters and events both past and present. The blue background is an example of an organiser for a non-fiction event. Colour coding was used to distinguish groups chunking the information.

**References:**
Beech L W (2001) *Short Reading Passages & Graphic Organizers to Build Comprehension*
Buzan T (2003) *Mind Maps for Kids*
Mackay N (2011) *Taking the Hell Out of Homework*
Oczkus L (2003) *Interactive Think-Aloud Lessons*