

# SOS SPOTLIGHT ON STRATEGIES

Simple instructional strategies that incorporate digital media in meaningful, effective, and practical ways.

## CONCEPT CIRCLES



[Concept Circles](#) (Vacca & Vacca, 2001) are tools which help students move beyond memorization of terms and definitions by focusing them on analyzing the relationships between those words. In this strategy, students use a circle organizer to analyze how vocabulary words are or are not related through a concept or topic. There are different models for the circle: some are simply a circle divided into quarters; others, like the one used in the example below, provide space for note taking and identification of the concept.



Materials: text excerpt, concept circle, writing utensil

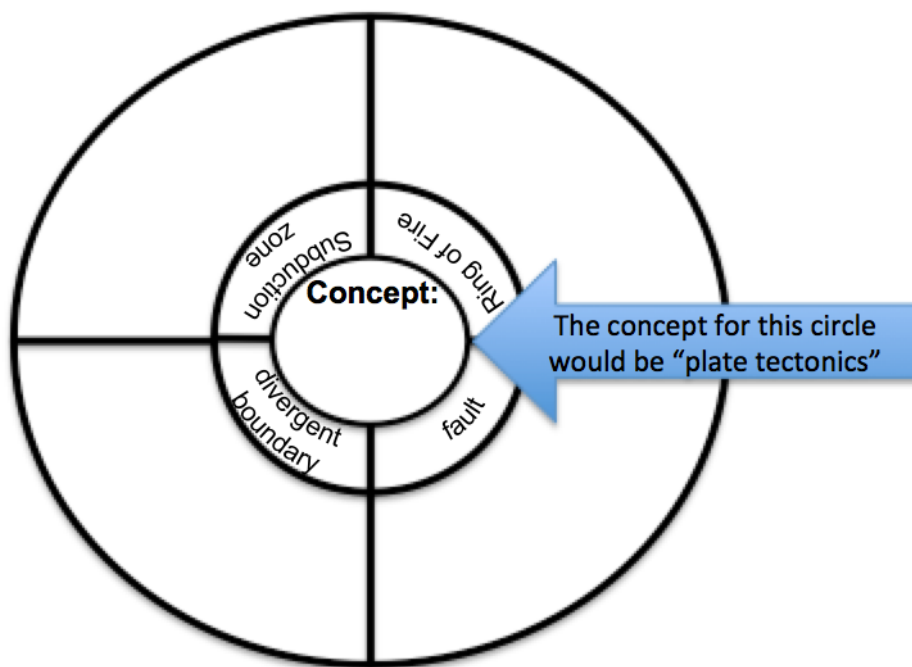
1. Locate text or a printable transcript related to the topic you are discussing with students. For our sample, we'll use a text excerpt or video transcript that discusses plate tectonics.
2. Prepare a concept circle organizer ahead of time. See example below.
  - Write a different concept-related vocabulary word in each section of the circle.
  - Optional modifications include filling in 2 of the words, and then asking students to supply the other 2 and provide written justification for why they fit the concept.
3. Display the circle to students and engage in vocabulary development discussions to ensure that students have a foundational understanding of the terms.
4. Have students read or listen to the text, pausing occasionally for note taking.
5. Ask students to discuss word meanings with a partner. They will also discuss what the words have in common. If they are able to articulate a concept ask them to record it in the center of the circle.
6. Debrief with students by asking them to share the concept connections between the words. Encourage them to refer back to the text/media to provide evidence for their reasoning.

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This sample concept circle would be given to students before they watch a video on plate tectonics. After reviewing the 4 words in the inner ring, students would watch the video and take notes to help explain/define the terms, then use the information they collected to determine the overarching idea that was presented in the segment. This concept is then recorded in the center circle. The concept circle then becomes an organizer for a written piece in which students explain their understanding of the central concept.



- Use as a mechanism to synthesize material that has been read, heard, or watched.
- Use as a quick comprehension check at the end of a lesson.
- Use as a discussion starter.
- Use as a prewriting organizer to help students develop a cohesive written explanation.