

Categorize

When you categorize information, you create a system that helps you sort items into categories, or groups with shared characteristics, so that you can understand the information better. Categorizing helps you see what groups of items have in common.

1 Identify similarities and differences among items you need to understand.

You need to pay careful attention and sometimes do research to find the similarities and differences among the facts, topics, or objects that you need to understand. Scientists find groups, or categories, of related animals by studying the details of the animals' bodies. For example, insects with similar wings, legs, and mouthparts probably belong in the same category. Gather similar information about all the things you need to understand. For example, if you know the location of one thing, try to find the locations of all the things you are studying. If you have different types of information about your topics, you will not be able to group them easily.

2 Create a system to group items with common characteristics.

Once you have gathered similar kinds of information on the items you need to understand, look for items that share characteristics, or features, in common. Create categories based on a feature shared by all of the facts, topics, or objects you need to understand. For example, if you have gathered information on the population and political systems of several countries, you could create a system of categories grouping them by the size of their population or their type of political system.

3 Form the groupings.

Put each of the items that you are studying into one of the categories that you have created. If some items do not fit, you may need to make a new category or modify your categories. Label each category for the characteristic shared by its members. Examples of labels for categories might include "Countries with more than 100 million people," "Countries with fewer than 1 million people," "Democracies," or "Dictatorships."