Architects For Learning
BUILDING STRONG LEARNING FOUNDATIONS

Frequently Asked Questions about Brain Frames®

Can anyone use Brain Frames?

Yes. Brain Frames can be introduced in the preschool years or any time after that. Students in all grades find them helpful, and adults do too. If you need to organize your language and thinking, Brain Frames are go-to tools.

Are Brain Frames just another set of graphic organizers?

No. Brain Frames are unique in lots of ways!

- Unlike traditional graphic organizers – pre-made graphics that students fill in – teachers and students construct Brain Frames by hand from scratch, each and every time.
- Brain Frames can be used anytime and anywhere. Once you know all six patterns, you can jot down your thoughts and organize them on the spot. No special materials or software are needed.
- Because Brain Frames are universal tools for organizing, they can be used in so many ways! Teachers can use them to plan and organize lessons and curriculum, present information in class, and even to run meetings with colleagues or parents. Students can use them for note taking, studying, pre-writing, project planning, answering test questions, and guiding oral expression. They're incredibly useful because they can be used for so many different purposes.
- Professional development in Brain Frames is research-based and on-going. Like all good teaching, our training follows a gradual release of responsibility model: I DO IT → WE DO IT → Y'ALL DO IT → YOU DO IT.
- A strong research base lies behind Brain Frames and their many applications.

How long does it take for students to learn Brain Frames?

It varies. Some students take to them very quickly. They "see" the patterns right away, and they remember them and can make them after very little direct instruction. For them, learning Brain Frames isn't hard; they need practice and guidance with using them in meaningful ways before they think to use them without prompting.

Students who struggle with visual-spatial processing sometimes need more direct instruction and more practice before they can construct Brain Frames accurately.

The speed with which students internalize and use them on their own is often related to the frequency with which they and their teachers use them.

Can teachers use other graphics in addition to Brain Frames in their classrooms?

Absolutely! Brain Frames are excellent tools for representing language and thinking patterns,

but they don't do everything. Information can be conveyed and organized in many forms, including pictures, infographics, mind maps, charts, graphs, and outlines (to name a few).

We encourage teachers and students to use graphics such as these along with Brain Frames.

Where did Brain Frames come from?

Lots of people. They were influenced by lots of people, anyway. In the 1970s, Tony Buzan popularized mind maps, visual diagrams showing thought associations in a "sunburst" pattern. In the 1970s and 80s, Edward Tufte wrote a series of books on the subject of information graphics, which are used to represent complex information, data, or knowledge quickly. In the 1980s, David Hyerle took these principals and those of others to develop Thinking Maps®, visual representations of eight patterns of cognition. In 2008, Dan Roam developed a set of guidelines for solving problems and conveying ideas in his popular book, *The Back of the Napkin*.

All of these visual systems have a common goal: to depict information that would have to be explained using a lot of language in a visual format that, simply due to the way it's designed, tells a good deal of the story without words.

Vygotsky has long asserted that language and cognition are "inextricably intertwined." Cazden beautifully shows that language in school is "both curriculum content and learning environment – both the object of knowledge and a principal means through which other knowledge is acquired." Our goal in developing Brain Frames was to give a way to anchor language by depicting the discourse patterns that teachers and students use every day as they listen to others, express themselves, read, and write.