CRISS FOR PARENTS
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Background Knowledge

Each of us brings our **background knowledge** and experiences to learning situations. As teachers, we help bring out students' background knowledge before they read, so they can relate what they already know to the new information. This integration is the way we all make meaning. It is *how* we understand. When you work with your child at home, it's important for you to bring out his or her background, as well. Feel free to add information you know, too. Here are some ways you can help.

Before you start

- *Preview the reading selection.* With your child, look at the *bold face headings* and *sub-headings*. Look at *pictures, diagrams*, or other *graphics*. Read the *first paragraph*. If there is a *summary* at the end, read that, too. If your child is reading a textbook, look at the *questions* at the beginning or end of the section. This will give you an idea of what will be covered in the reading.

Here are some ways to find out what your child already knows:

- *Ask questions.* Let's say the reading selection is on spiders. You might ask: Have you ever seen a spider? Where was it? What was it doing? What did it look like? How big was it?

- *Brainstorm.* Take one or two minutes and talk about what your child knows or thinks he knows about the topic *spiders*. Together make a list of what you know. Write down questions you have about the topic, too.

- *Write.* Have your child write a few sentences or thoughts on the topic.

- *Discuss.* Talk with your child about the topic.

- *Draw.* Have your child draw a picture of the *spider*, showing where it lives and what it is doing, or draw it eating or interacting with people or other animals.

Power Notes

Power Notes help students differentiate between main ideas and details. The procedure is similar to outlining, but much easier for students to use because main ideas and details are simply assigned numbers. Main ideas are Power 1 ideas while details are Power 2s, 3s, 4s, etc.

> *Power 1: Main idea*
> > *Power 2: Detail or support for Power 1*
> > > *Power 3: Detail or support for Power 2*
> > > > .
> > > > .
> > > > .

Here is a sample of Power Notes.

> *1: Animals*
> > *2: Dog*
> > > *3: Collie*
> > > > *4: Lassie*
> > > *3: German Shepherd*
> > *2: Cat*
> > > *3: Siamese*
> > > *3: Calico*

Notice the parallel structure in the preceding example. All of the Power 2s are *types* of animals; the Power 3s are *breeds*; and if we included another Power 4, it would be a *name* of a specific dog or cat.
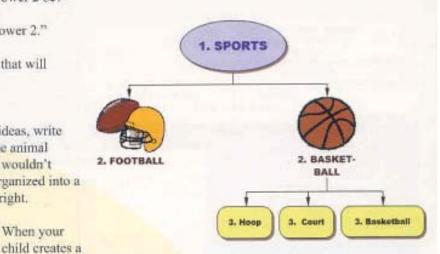
Practice the Power structure with your child. Pick a Power 1 on a familiar topic such as sports, food, or TV shows. Have your child give you Powers 2s, 3s, and 4s. For example, if you say:
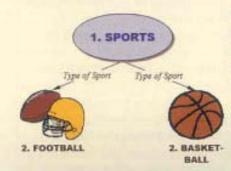
"Power 1 is sports. What will Power 2 be?"
"Football"
"Great, now give me another Power 2."
"Basketball"
"Right, now give me Power 3s that will fit under basketball."
"Hoop, court, and ball"

As your child gives you these ideas, write them on a piece of paper. Although the animal example above looks like outlining, it wouldn't have to. The sports example can be organized into a **Power Map** similar to the one on the right.

When your child creates a **Power Map**, sometimes it is helpful to write on the connecting arrows the relationship between the two types of information (see the example at left).