



Defining Features Matrix

Overview

Defining Features Matrix is an approach to note-taking that has been shown to be more effective than writing notes given only an outline (headings and subheadings), or when students write notes without additional structure.

A successfully completed defining features matrix would require students to carefully analyze, organize, and classify content in a quick-to-consume manner enhancing the benefits of notetaking.

Defining Features Matrix is ideal for: identifying distinguishing features across categories that may appear very similar and documenting how features may appear in varying circumstances.

Defining Features Matrix meets the following [WSU Learning Goals](#): critical and creative thinking, scientific literacy, information literacy, and depth, breadth, and integration of learning.

Group size: 1-2 | **Active Time:** 15 mins | **Prep. Time:** Medium

Active time is an estimate and may vary depending on your class.

Implementation

Suggested Tech Tools: Blackboard Assignment, Blackboard Discussion Board, Google Sheets, Padlet, VoiceThread

Instructor:

Provide students with a table with pre-defined key features (or considerations) and category (or context) headings.

Students:

1. For each category, describe in detail how each feature will present itself (one consideration per row).

Variations & Tips:

- For **face-to-face** and **video conference (VC)** courses, consider assigning the feature matrix as an individual assignment and have students provide feedback during class time.
- In **online** courses, have students provide peer feedback through a Blackboard Discussion Board or VoiceThread.
- For **large-enrollment** courses, consider having students work in small groups and have students submit their completed matrix as an assignment on Blackboard or upload the file to Padlet.
- Have students decide if the defining feature is present/absent in each category instead of describing in detail.
- Turn this activity into a game. Prepare categories, answers, and questions using existing online templates to save time (see 'Resources' below for a Jeopardy example). This is a great option for test-prep.
- Encourage students to link to additional reference material and compare their tables with peers and expert content.

You may also be interested in:

Jigsaw
Twenty Questions
Concept Mapping

Resources:

[Jeopardy Online Game Template](#)

[Getting Students "Partially" Involved in Note-Taking Using Graphic Organizers](#)

[Effects of online note taking formats and self-monitoring prompts on learning from online text](#)

[An integrative review of the cognitive costs and benefits of note-taking](#)

Let's explore the possibilities together!

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