Word Sorts

This strategy has been used in the following ABLE lesson(s):
  Child Safety - Reading Strategy
  http://mercury.educ.kent.edu/database/eureka/detail_lesson_general.cfm?LessonsID=158

  How Government Works - Reading Strategy
  http://mercury.educ.kent.edu/database/eureka/detail_lesson_general.cfm?LessonsID=66

  Making a Grocery List - Reading Strategy
  http://mercury.educ.kent.edu/database/eureka/detail_lesson_general.cfm?LessonsID=95

Word sorts are small group, categorizing and classifying activities. Word sorts help students activate and use their knowledge as well as providing them an opportunity to learn from and with each other.

Words and phrases from materials that students will read (or have read) may be selected for use with word sorts. Twelve to twenty words or phrases should be selected; only a few words or phrases that are unfamiliar to students should be included.

After words/phrases are selected, multiple copies of the complete set (one for each small group) should be made. Each set is then cut apart, resulting in a cut-up set of words/ phrases for each group. Storing these in envelopes works well.

Open Word Sort:
An *open word sort* is a divergent thinking activity. There is no "right" way to sort words in an open word sort; instead, the focus is on the process students undergo as they complete the activity and on their reasons for creating groups of words.

Students work in pairs or triads. Directions for an open word sort are as follows: "Working together, decide how to group these words/ phrases. You can't put all of them in one group, nor can you have a 'group' for each slip of paper. Other than that, it's up to you. Be ready to explain your decisions to the rest of us."

Give students 5 to 8 minutes to complete their groupings. Then ask volunteers to explain their groupings and the reasons for them. If the open word sort is a pre-reading activity, you might conclude by asking students what they expect to be reading about and why.

Closed Word Sort:
In a *closed word sort*, the teacher provides categories for students. Other than this, the activity is completed as above. Although closed word sorts tend to yield more convergent responses from groups, the goal is not to produce "correct" responses. Rather, the focus is again on students' thinking processes and on their reasoning.

Source: Nancy Padak, Kent State University.