

This tool accesses information that students feel is important, they agree with, or is still circling in their minds.

Triangle-Square-Circle

When we drive, the roads are full of signs that visually and quickly communicate to us. We are familiar with the red, octagonal Stop sign and those signs showing a red circle with a red line through it telling us not to do something. Many traffic signs, their shapes and colors, are universal and can be recognized around the world to represent common messages. When drivers see these signs they intrinsically understand, process, and comply with the information on the sign to drive safely.



Similarly, teachers can use symbols to encourage students to develop these specific skills during instruction by using graphic prompts such as the **Triangle-Square-Circle** strategy. This simple technique asks the students to do three things:

1. Draw a Triangle and write “three points” from the lesson that they learned or feel are important.
2. Next, draw a Square and jot down statements about the lesson that “squares” or is in sync with their thinking.
3. Finally, draw a Circle and write questions or comments that are still “circling” in their minds.

Following a lesson, this tool allows the students to take breaks during learning to do a quick assessment of what they know and need to know to process the learning. Such symbols can be used as a foundation to assist students in processing concepts. **Triangle-Square-Circle activates thinking about what students are learning and helps identify and reinforce key concepts or important facts.** Students also begin to develop preliminary conclusions as to whether they are in agreement with the information and determine areas they still have questions about.

Triangle-Square-Circle provides an opportunity for students to express their thoughts about the concepts in their own words. It also provides the teacher with an assessment of how well the students understand the concepts being taught. This activity, completed during a lesson, promotes metacognition by guiding the students through reflection and articulation on the concepts they are learning. You can use this strategy at the beginning of a lesson as a warmup or review or to pre-assess the knowledge level of the students.


Use Triangle-Square-Circle during the middle of instruction to allow students time to process the information, then check for understanding. For example, ask students to complete Triangle-Square-Circle during Guided Practice. When students complete writing their comments next to the symbols, pair them with a partner to discuss what each wrote and ask questions or obtain clarifications. You can also use Triangle-Square-Circle as a Closing Activity or Exit Ticket to informally assess understanding and plan more effectively for the next lesson.

Triangle-Square-Circle (continued)


Name: _____ Date: _____

Triangle - Square - Circle


What are *three important points* that you have learned?



What is something that *squared* or agreed with your thinking?



What is something still *circling* in your head?



How to Use Triangle-Square-Circle

1. Triangle

After a lesson, have students draw a triangle, and beside it write three important points from the presentation or reading just completed.

2. Square

Then, students draw a square, and next to it write anything that squares with their thinking or anything they agree with.

3. Circle

Finally, students draw a circle, and next to it write anything that is still circling in their head or questions they have about the material or concept.

When to Use Triangle-Square-Circle

Triangle-Square-Circle can be used at various points of instruction:

- ♦ As a Closing Activity or Exit Ticket to formatively assess students' understanding of a lesson
- ♦ Prior to reviewing for an assessment, so the teacher knows which areas to focus on for test preparation
- ♦ As a warmup to determine the existing level of content knowledge before the lesson begins
- ♦ As a review activity so students can apply prior learning and prepare to build on it with new concepts
- ♦ To elicit discussion, clarify key points, or correct misunderstandings during a lesson

Triangle-Square-Circle (continued)

Triangle-Square-Circle Variations

Alternate Triangle Options

Instead of writing three facts, students list items that need more clarification.

Alternate Circle Options

Instead of things students are still thinking about, they share how this information fits.

Cooperative Learning

Students work in pairs or small groups to discuss their responses to the symbols and facilitate discussions.

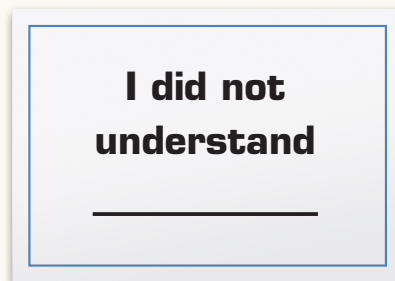
Use Different Symbols

Instead of a triangle, square, or circle, use a hand and fingers graphic to determine the level of understanding and identify questions where students continue to struggle.



Use Processing Cards

Use cards with discussion prompts for students to answer and discuss in small groups. This encourages students to take time to determine their progress in the lesson.





Triangle-Square-Circle (continued)

Value of Using Triangle-Square-Circle

- ♦ Helps teachers monitor the progress students are making on concepts in the lesson
- ♦ Promotes metacognition and facilitates skills in thinking about how learning happens
- ♦ Encourages students to take charge of their learning
- ♦ Provides opportunities for students to reflect, recognize, and articulate what they are learning
- ♦ Helps all students to process and make sense of what they are learning
- ♦ Provides opportunities for cooperative and collaborative learning
- ♦ Gives the students an opportunity for feedback during the lesson
- ♦ Allows the teacher to address misunderstanding and intervene immediately to correct learning

For grades PK–1, this strategy should be used with the entire class, rather than as an independent task, with the teacher charting ideas. Of course, since many children will want to participate, there may be more than three ideas in each shape.