

## Introduction

A glossary is a list of terms that relate to a particular subject matter or topic. Each term is accompanied by a description or explanation, and where appropriate a diagram or other representation, within the context of the subject. A glossary entry is generally more descriptive than a dictionary definition.

Creating a class glossary can be used to:

- elicit students' prior understanding of subject-specific terms
- develop a growing bank of descriptions to help students understand and use new words in written and oral tasks
- support students' understanding of scientific descriptions and explanations
- develop the strategy of using word sources as a real-life, valuable investigative research strategy.

## Using a class glossary

- Introduce a term and discuss what students think it means within the context of the science topic. Possible strategies include students connecting the word to a feature or aspect of the topic, and students using the word in a spoken sentence to explain topic, concept or context.
- Create a shared understanding of the term and record it in the class science journal or as part of the word wall.
- Introduce the conventional technical meaning of the term when appropriate for students learning (i.e. after they have begun exploring the phenomenon).
- Encourage students to practise using the terms in the glossary in order to become familiar with them. Students may wish to amend a description of a word after becoming more familiar with how it is used in a particular context. This may occur when writing, talking or making annotations to diagrams.
- Integrate the glossary across all curriculum areas where appropriate. For example, in a literacy lesson discuss various meanings for the term.
- The glossary could be a part of the science journal or the word wall for a particular unit.

**Note:** It is important to ask students for 'descriptions' of the terms rather than 'definitions'. 'Definitions' are often viewed as fixed and unchangeable, whereas 'descriptions' support students to see that ideas can change as their understanding develops.