Unstructured Sorts
“A Cognitive Stretch”

1st • During Brainstorming have students write down each item they have generated on a slip of paper. “Post-Its” work especially well.

Afterwards, have the pair/team lay all of the items out on a table or desk so they can all see/read them. Give them the following direction:

"Working together, sort these into ‘X’ number of categories."

2nd • Once each pair/team has completed (or nearly completed) the task ask the groups to:
- briefly and clearly describe the system the team developed and
- rotate around the room to learn the systems the other pair/teams developed. A member of the team could remain at the table to explain their system to the “visiting” team(s).

3rd • The pairs/teams return to their tables. Now list all the category systems generated in that round.

4th • Now ask the groups to come up with a new category system that the class has not used yet.

5th • Repeat this process several times, each time listing all the category systems generated and instructing the teams to come up with new ones each time.

Results of Unstructured Sorts

Students are pushed to see the beneath the obvious associations and links of the items. Each student is involved in deeper analysis and synthesis of the critical components and attributes of the items being sorted than with a typical single sort.

There is no end to the content for Unstructured Sorts.