

Sorting the Natural World: Creating a Classification Key

Learning objective: To design and use a classification key to group living things based on their observable characteristics.

Use this writing frame to help you explain how you sorted your chosen group of animals. Follow the prompts to describe the features you chose and how your key works.

To understand the diversity of life in our gardens and forests, scientists use classification keys to group animals based on their specific features.

Word bank: characteristics · classification · identifying · invertebrate · vertebrate · whereas · alternatively · consequently · specifically · unique features

1. Introduction: Which group of animals have you chosen to classify and why did you choose them? Start by saying: 'I have chosen to classify a group of animals that includes...' (2 marks)

2. First Questions: What is the very first 'Yes or No' question you would ask to split your group in half? Start by saying: 'The first question in my key is... because this helps to divide the animals into two distinct groups by checking if they have...' (3 marks)

3. Physical Features: Describe two physical characteristics you used to identify the animals. Start by saying: 'I also looked for features such as... and... which are important for identifying these creatures.' (3 marks)

4. Testing the Key: Choose one animal from your group and explain how your key leads to its name. Start by saying: 'To test my key, I followed the path for a... which led me to the correct name because...' (3 marks)

5. Conclusion: Why is it helpful for scientists like Bea the honeybee or Nova the owl to use these keys? Start by saying: 'Classification keys are useful tools because they allow researchers to...' (2 marks)

Extension challenge: Try creating a 'branched' diagram for your key. Can you think of one animal that is difficult to classify and explain why?