



THE HIDDEN LANGUAGE OF PRACTICAL WORK

Doing, discussing, describing – practical work has a language too.



THE IDEA

Practical work isn't just about doing – it's also about understanding, communicating and evaluating.

In subjects like Science, Design & Technology, Art, Drama, PE and ICT, students need specific language to follow instructions, use equipment safely, describe processes and explain results.

EAL learners often manage the practical skills but struggle with the language that goes with them.

Making this language visible helps all learners take part more fully, work safely and show their understanding.



IN THE CLASSROOM

Pre-teach key vocabulary and commands.
Use visuals, labelled diagrams and demonstrations.
Model how to describe processes and results.
Provide sentence frames for observations, methods and evaluations.
Give opportunities for students to talk through what they are doing.
Revisit and recycle the language regularly.

THE 3 STEPS

1



IDENTIFY THE LANGUAGE

Find the key language.

Look at the practical task or unit.
Identify essential vocabulary (e.g. equipment, actions, materials, safety, measurement).
Highlight useful phrases and structures (e.g. first, next, then, because, as a result).
Consider the language needed for discussion and evaluation.

"What are the key words here?"

"What instructions do students need to understand?"

"What language will they need to describe and explain?"

2



MAKE IT VISIBLE

Teach and model the language.

Pre-teach key words and phrases in context.
Use visuals, demonstrations and real equipment.
Model how to use the language when giving instructions, describing processes or explaining results.
Provide sentence frames and scaffolds.

"Measure 50 millilitres of ..."

"Heat the solution until ..."

"I observed that ..."

"This happens because ..."

3



USE AND DEVELOP

Give opportunities to use it.

Build the language into practical activities.
Encourage students to talk while they work (in pairs or groups).
Provide opportunities to write up results, explain methods and evaluate.
Give feedback on both the practical skills and language use.
Revisit and extend the language with new tasks.

"We carried out this method by ..."

"The results show that ..."

"One improvement would be ..."



WHY IT WORKS

- Helps EAL learners participate safely and confidently.
- Builds understanding of both the process and the concepts.
- Develops spoken and written academic language.
- Supports higher quality practical work, reports and evaluations.
- Benefits all learners, not just EAL students.



EAL UPGRADE

- Create a practical work word bank.
- Use visuals and labelled diagrams.
- Provide sentence frames for methods, observations and evaluations.
- Include language in safety briefings.
- Encourage students to explain their thinking while they work.
- Revisit key language regularly.



TRY IT TOMORROW

- Choose one practical lesson.
- Identify 5 key words or phrases.
- Create a simple visual support (e.g. equipment labels or a process diagram).
- Model the language and ask students to use it during the activity.
- Ask for a short written or spoken reflection at the end.



TEACHER LANGUAGE

"Let's look at the key words for this task."
"Can you say what you are doing?"
"Use this sentence frame to describe what you observed."
"Why do you think that happened?"
"What would you do differently next time?"

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