

Vocabulary Taboo

Explain a concept precisely enough for someone else to identify it.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Choose known subject terms and two obvious clue words to exclude for each.

Teach it in four steps

1. Model explaining a word without saying it or the prohibited clues.
2. Pairs take turns describing and guessing.
3. Ask the guesser to explain which clue was decisive.
4. Finish with a precise definition and correct any misleading clues.

Worked classroom example

Science: describe evaporation without saying liquid or gas: "It happens at the surface; a puddle can shrink even below boiling temperature."

Teacher prompt: "Which detail supports your explanation? Show me how you know."

Check understanding

Does the explanation distinguish evaporation from boiling rather than only trigger a guess?

Fade the support

Remove prohibition lists and ask for an accurate definition for an unfamiliar listener.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: explain denominator without "bottom" or "fraction".

Humanities: describe a primary source without "first" or "original".

Adjust the language support

A1-A2 access: keep the subject goal; use visuals, a small word bank, pointing or drawing and partner rehearsal. Use a home language to establish meaning where helpful.

B1-B2 extension: ask for fuller explanations, precise subject vocabulary and qualifications. Reduce sentence openings when learners can organise the response independently.

These are starting points, not placement rules. Judge support from the learner's response to this task; proficiency can differ across skills.