

Make the Question Smaller

Build towards a demanding question through manageable entry points.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Keep the original intellectual goal visible while breaking entry into smaller questions.

Teach it in four steps

1. Display the full question and name its goal.
2. Ask one manageable question about a necessary part.
3. Connect that answer to the next piece of reasoning.
4. Reassemble the parts into an answer to the original question.

Worked classroom example

Science: for “Explain why the trolley accelerates”, ask: Which forces act? Which direction has the greater force? What does that imply for motion? Then rebuild the explanation.

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

Check understanding

Ask for the whole explanation; several isolated correct answers do not yet show the connection.

Fade the support

Remove intermediate prompts on a new diagram.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: separate identifying information from choosing and justifying a method.

Humanities: separate claim, source evidence and significance before rebuilding an argument.

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.