

The Model Answer Autopsy

Help learners see how an answer earns its meaning and quality, then transfer those moves to a fresh response.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Choose a short model matched to the task and criteria. Prepare a weaker version with one important element missing.

Teach it in four steps

1. Read the question first and identify the thinking and language it requires.
2. Read the model for meaning before highlighting anything.
3. Annotate what each part does: answer, evidence, explanation or qualification. Compare with the weaker version.
4. Close the model and write a response to a new question using the same useful moves.

Science: explaining a result

Question: Why did the plant in brighter light grow more? Model: "The plant received more light, which increased photosynthesis when other conditions were suitable. This produced more material for growth." Compare with: "It grew more because it had more light."

Teacher: "Which words explain the mechanism? What does the shorter answer leave for the reader to guess?"

Check understanding

Check the fresh response for the explanatory mechanism. A learner who copies the model accurately has not yet demonstrated transfer.

Fade the support

Remove colour coding and labels. Ask learners to evaluate their own answer using the question and criteria.

Adapt it across subjects

History: distinguish a claim from evidence and an explanation of significance.

Maths: compare a correct result with a solution that also makes its reasoning clear.

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.