

Stop Giving Bigger Word Lists

Prioritise useful vocabulary and meaningful reuse over list length.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Select a small number of high-value words and plan repeated meaningful use.

Teach it in four steps

1. Identify words that unlock the upcoming task.
2. Connect each word to a clear example and non-example.
3. Use each in speaking and writing during the lesson.
4. Retrieve and reuse the words after a gap.

Worked classroom example

Science: teach conductor and insulator with materials and a circuit rather than assigning twenty disconnected terms.

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

Check understanding

Use an unfamiliar material description and ask learners to reason with the terms.

Fade the support

Remove definitions while retaining examples, then retrieve both without prompts.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: prioritise equivalent and simplify before fraction practice.

Humanities: prioritise bias and purpose before evaluating a source.

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.