Teach the Language of Thinking

Name the thinking move first, then teach language that makes that move visible in an answer.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Choose two task verbs attached to the same subject material.

Teach it in four steps

1. Name the thinking move first, then teach language that makes that move visible in an answer.
2. Compare two short answers that perform different thinking moves.
3. Match each answer to the appropriate command and explain the match.
4. Answer a fresh question, then check that the response actually performs the requested move.

Worked example: Teach the Language of Thinking

Describe a graph: state its visible trend. Explain the graph: connect that trend to a mechanism. A fluent description does not become an explanation merely by adding because.

Teacher prompt: “Show the relationship and explain the choice you made.”

Check understanding

Change describe to explain or compare. Check that the response changes, not just its first word.

Fade the support

Remove the command glossary once learners can identify the thinking independently.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: distinguish calculate and justify. Humanities: distinguish describe and evaluate.

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.