

Technical Words Aren't Always the Problem

Look for blocking general academic words as well as obvious technical terms in the current task.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Preview an actual upcoming task and choose words that could block its meaning.

Teach it in four steps

1. Look for blocking general academic words as well as obvious technical terms in the current task.
2. Identify general academic words as well as technical terms.
3. Teach the smallest useful set through examples from the task.
4. Check whether learners can now enter the task and use the words meaningfully.

Worked example: Technical Words Aren't Always the Problem

In “evaluate the reliability of the readings”, reliability and evaluate may block access more than thermometer. Teach them through repeated readings and a judgement, not a long glossary.

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

Check understanding

Give a new question using the selected words and ask learners what it requires.

Fade the support

Remove supplied definitions while keeping the original task demand.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: teach difference when the problem needs subtraction. Humanities: clarify perspective before a source comparison.

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.