

The Vocabulary Iceberg

Map a word's meaning, form, pronunciation, combinations and subject uses to expose knowledge beyond a definition.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Choose a central concept and useful relationships around it.

Teach it in four steps

1. Map a word's meaning, form, pronunciation, combinations and subject uses to expose knowledge beyond a definition.
2. Connect examples, contrasts and related processes.
3. Label each connection with the relationship it expresses.
4. Use the network to explain the concept, then revise an inaccurate link.

Worked example: The Vocabulary Iceberg

For evaporation, record pronunciation, the evaporate/evaporation forms, its meaning, the phrase "evaporation from the surface", and an example below boiling temperature. Knowing a definition is only one part of this record.

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

Check understanding

Ask a learner to explain one connection and justify one contrast.

Fade the support

Remove the supplied links and ask learners to build their own labelled network.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: connect equivalent fractions and common factors. Humanities: map migration, causes, destinations and consequences.

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.