Can They Actually Use the Word?

Check whether a learner can use a word accurately in a fresh subject explanation, not only recognise its definition.

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. Check whether a learner can use a word accurately in a fresh subject explanation, not only recognise its definition.
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: Can They Actually Use the Word?

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.