

Sometimes It Isn't Vocabulary

Check sentence relationships, references and structure when known vocabulary still does not produce understanding.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Choose a passage where pronouns or omitted nouns make the relationship difficult to follow.

Teach it in four steps

1. Check sentence relationships, references and structure when known vocabulary still does not produce understanding.
2. Identify its possible antecedents in the surrounding sentences.
3. Substitute the most plausible noun and check the meaning.
4. Explain the relationship using explicit nouns before returning to the original wording.

Worked example: Sometimes It Isn't Vocabulary

In “The plants received different amounts of light. This affected their growth”, all the words may be familiar. Resolving what “this” refers to and how the sentences connect may still be the reading barrier.

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

Check understanding

Give a new passage and ask learners to justify the antecedent from the meaning.

Fade the support

Remove highlighting and ask learners to identify unclear references themselves.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: clarify “this value” in a solution. Humanities: track who “they” refers to across an account.

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.