Are You Testing Science or English?

Identify whether a test is intended to reveal science understanding or ability to express that understanding in English.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Choose the subject understanding being assessed and a response mode that does not conceal it.

Teach it in four steps

1. Identify whether a test is intended to reveal science understanding or ability to express that understanding in English.
2. Offer an oral explanation, diagram or practical demonstration alongside writing where appropriate.
3. Check the same subject criteria across the response modes.
4. Record language needs separately and teach the language required for later written tasks.

Worked example: Are You Testing Science or English?

A learner explains a force relationship accurately using a diagram but struggles to write the explanation. This is evidence for planning language support, not proof of weak science understanding.

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

Check understanding

Use a new example in the less-supported mode and compare the conceptual reasoning.

Fade the support

Fade response-mode support when the required written language becomes accessible; preserve relevant access arrangements.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: spoken justification beside notation. Humanities: oral source interpretation followed by a short written 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.