

When L1 Gets in the Way

Check when a translated word or phrase changes the intended meaning and repair it with contextual evidence.

5 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Choose a short phrase and the concept it must express in context.

Teach it in four steps

1. Check when a translated word or phrase changes the intended meaning and repair it with contextual evidence.
2. Compare the translation with the context and an example.
3. Translate back or explain in different wording to expose a changed meaning.
4. Keep the accurate term or phrase and use it in the subject task.

Worked example: When L1 Gets in the Way

The word “table” might refer to data or furniture. A translation is useful only if it preserves the intended meaning in the task. Check against the displayed data table.

Teacher prompt: “Does this wording preserve the meaning in this context?”

Check understanding

Ask learners to use the translated term to interpret a new example.

Fade the support

Move from teacher-provided checks to learner-selected meaning checks.

Adapt it across subjects

Maths: check everyday and technical meanings. Humanities: retain source context and attribution when translating evidence.

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.