

EXPLAIN HOW AND WHY THINGS HAPPEN.

WHAT IS EXPLANATION WRITING?

Explanation writing explains processes, ideas or phenomena so that the reader understands how or why something happens.

It is factual, clear and well-organised.

PURPOSE

- To explain how something works
- To explain why something happens
- To inform and increase understanding
- To present information in a logical way

KEY FEATURES



PRESENT TENSE

Use present tense to describe general truths and processes.



CAUSE AND EFFECT

Explain reasons and results clearly.



SEQUENCING

Present steps or stages in logical order.



TECHNICAL LANGUAGE

Use precise terms and subject-specific vocabulary.



THIRD PERSON

Write in an impersonal style using 'it', 'they' or 'this process'.

EXAMPLE EXTRACT (ANNOTATED)

HOW VOLCANOES ERUPT

Deep beneath the Earth's surface, rocks melt due to extreme heat. This molten rock is called magma. Because magma is less dense than the solid rock around it, it rises slowly through cracks and weak spots in the Earth's crust.

As the magma rises, it collects in a magma chamber. When pressure builds up—caused by more magma rising or gases trapped inside—it forces magma towards the surface.

Eventually, the pressure becomes too great and the magma is pushed out through a vent. This is when a volcano erupts. Hot lava, ash, gases and rock are expelled into the air.

After an eruption, lava may flow down the sides of the volcano and ash may fall, affecting the surrounding area. Over time, layers of cooled lava and ash build up, and the volcano's shape may change.

Volcanoes can be dangerous, but they also shape the landscape and create fertile soil that supports plant life.

1 GENERAL STATEMENT
Introduces the topic and gives a basic overview.

2 CAUSE AND EFFECT
Explains why the magma moves towards the surface.

3 SEQUENCING (STEP)
Explains what happens next in the process.

4 ADDITIONAL DETAIL
Gives more information about the effects.

5 CONCLUSION
Finishes with a final thought or result.

TEXT STRUCTURE: EXPLANATION



TITLE

Clearly states what is being explained.



GENERAL STATEMENT



SEQUENCED EXPLANATION

Explain the steps or causes and effects in order.



CONCLUSION

Summarise or explain the importance of the process.

LANGUAGE FEATURES



Present tense: Water boils at 100°C.



Passive voice: The solution is heated.



Cause and effect: Because... / As a result...



Sequence words: first, next, then, after that, finally



Technical vocabulary: evaporation, compound, pressure, photosynthesis



Conjunctions: because, so, therefore, as, since



Impersonal style: It is believed that... / This process...

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

To introduce:

- This text explains...
- The process of...
- This article describes...

To sequence:

- First, ...
- Next, ...
- Then, ...
- After that, ...
- Finally, ...

To explain cause:

- Because...
- Due to the fact that...
- As a result of...

To show result:

- Therefore, ...
- As a result, ...
- This leads to...

To conclude:

- In conclusion, ...
- This shows that...
- Overall, ...

WRITER'S CHECKLIST

- ☒ I have a clear title.
- ☒ I have introduced the topic.
- ☒ I have explained the steps or causes in order.
- ☒ I have used present tense.
- ☒ I have used technical vocabulary.
- ☒ I have used sequence words.
- ☒ I have explained cause and effect.
- ☒ I have written in the third person.
- ☒ I have ended with a conclusion.
- ☒ I have checked my spelling and punctuation.

STRONG vs WEAK EXPLANATIONS

WEAK

- Not in order
- Too much opinion
- Not enough detail
- No cause and effect
- Too informal
- Missing conclusion

Example (Weak):

Volcanoes are cool. They blow up and lava comes out. People are scared of them.

STRONG

- Clear sequence of events
- Explains how and why
- Uses technical vocabulary
- Factual and objective
- Cause and effect included
- Clear conclusion

Example (Strong):

Magma rises due to pressure in the magma chamber. When the pressure becomes too great, it forces magma out of the vent, causing an eruption.

SENTENCE STARTERS

This process begins when ...

The first stage is ...

Next, ...

This causes ...

As a result, ...

Finally, ...

This means that ...

Overall, ...

COMMON MISTAKES

- Using too many "and thens".
- Writing in the past tense.
- Giving opinions instead of facts.
- Not using technical vocabulary.
- Skipping steps in the process.
- Not explaining cause and effect.
- Forgetting to conclude.

CHALLENGE: IMPROVE IT!

Rewrite the weak explanation below to make it a strong explanation. Use the features on this poster.

Day and night happen. The Earth spins around. The sun goes away and it gets dark. Then it comes back and it gets light again.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

SHOW, DON'T TELL

Be specific and factual.

- ☒ Don't say: The process is interesting.
- ☒ Instead say: The process allows plants to convert light energy into chemical energy through photosynthesis, supporting life on Earth.

TOP TIP

PLAN - WRITE - CHECK



Plan your structure.



Write using clear features.



Check and improve.



GOOD EXPLANATIONS MAKE COMPLEX IDEAS SIMPLE AND UNDERSTANDABLE.

Be clear. Be logical. Be precise.