How to Explain Things So People Actually Understand

KS4 ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION SKILLS Ages 11-15 ⏰ 4 min read

Why Clear Explanations Matter

Every day, people try to explain things to each other—teachers explain maths, doctors explain health, friends explain jokes. But sometimes explanations are confusing. The best explainers know that understanding isn't about using clever words; it's about making ideas **simple, relatable, and easy to follow**.

Start with What People Already Know

The clearest explanations begin with something your audience understands. If you're explaining how the internet works to your grandparent, you might start with **the post office**, which they know well. This builds a bridge from what's familiar to what's new.

Think of it like climbing a hill: you don't jump to the top; you take one step at a time from where you're standing.

Use Simple Words First

Replace **complicated vocabulary** with everyday language. Instead of saying "utilise" say "use". Instead of "facilitate" say "help". Short sentences work better than long ones because your brain can focus on one idea at a time. **Avoid jargon**—special words that only experts understand—unless you explain what they mean first.

Make Helpful Comparisons

An **analogy** is when you compare something new to something familiar. Analogies are powerful because they let people use what they already know. For example, explaining a computer virus is easier if you compare it to a real virus: both copy themselves, both spread, both cause problems.

Think of it like explaining a new sport by comparing it to one your listener already plays.

Break Big Ideas into Chunks

Don't try to explain everything at once. **Divide information into smaller pieces** and explain each one before moving on. Use clear **headings and breaks** so readers know where one idea ends and another begins. This helps people stay focused.

Show, Don't Just Tell

Examples, pictures, diagrams, and demonstrations make explanations clearer. If you're explaining fractions, show it with a pizza cut into slices. If you're explaining gravity, drop something so people see it fall. **Real examples** stick in people's minds better than abstract descriptions.

Check Your Work

After explaining something, ask: "Does this make sense?" Watch for confused faces or questions. The best explainers **listen to feedback** and try different approaches if people don't understand. Not everyone's brain works the same way, so different explanations suit different people.

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