

Explanation Texts General Information

Purpose: to explain how or why

Suggested contexts: captions, leaflets, observations, flowcharts, science experiments, newspaper reports, letters, diaries

Explanatory texts generally go beyond simple 'description' in that they include information about causes, motives or reasons. Explanations and reports are sometimes confused when children are asked to 'explain' and they actually provide a report, e.g. what they did (or what happened) but not how and why. Like all text types, explanatory texts vary widely and are often found combined with other text types.

Generic Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general statement to introduce the topic being explained. (In the winter, some animals hibernate). • The steps or phases in a process are explained logically, in order. (When the nights get longer... because the temperature begins to drop... so the hedgehog looks for a safe place to hide.)
Language Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally (but not always) written in simple present tense. (Hedgehogs wake up again in the spring.) • Use of time/ sequencing adverbs, e.g. first, then, after that, finally. • Use of reinforcing and opposing adverbs to link ideas between sentences and paragraphs: e.g. in addition to, because of this.
Knowledge for the Writer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a title that shows what you are explaining, perhaps using why or how. (How do hedgehogs survive the winter? Why does it get dark at night?) • Decide whether you need to include images or other features to help your reader, e.g. diagrams, photographs, a flow chart, a text box, captions, a list or a glossary. • Use the first paragraph to introduce what you will be explaining. • Plan the steps in your explanation and check that you have included any necessary information about how and why things happen as they do. Add a few interesting details. • Interest the reader by talking directly to them (You'll be surprised to know that ... Have you ever thought about the way that ...?) or by relating the subject to their own experience at the end (So next time you see a pile of dead leaves in the autumn ...). • Re-read your explanation as if you know nothing at all about the subject. Check that there are no gaps in the information. • Remember that you can adapt explanatory texts or combine them with other text types to make them work effectively for your audience and purpose
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking and listening before reading and writing. • Teacher modelling, scribing and shared writing before children's independent attempt. • Increased understanding by the children of the form and features of discussion writing and then increasing ability to manipulate elements of writing to present a balanced argument, with or without a personal conclusion. • Increasing complexity, subtlety, challenge of task (for example, moving from simple for-and-against arguments to those with multiple viewpoints; moving from clear cut issues into those eliciting more subtle differences in views). • Increasing ability to recognise discussion and understand the devices used in the writing of others; in their own writing to discuss effectively as appropriate to their purpose and audience

Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about why things happen and how things work. Ask questions and speculate. • Give own simple oral explanations. • Start to connect ideas and events. • Communicate ideas through simple sentences, sometimes using words such as and/if/but/because
Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at captions/pictures/diagrams that explain a process • Explain orally and write a series of sentences to explain a simple process based on first hand experience
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral rehearsal of sentence structure • Joining words and joining clauses using 'and' and 'because' • Third person • Sequencing sentences to form short passages e.g. Chicks have a spike on their beak. This is called the egg tooth. • Introduction to use of question marks and exclamation marks to demarcate sentences • Use of capital letters for names and the pronoun I
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to and discuss wide range of explanation texts, learning new vocabulary • Create diagrams/flowcharts to explain after carrying out practical activities • Orally re-explain processes that have been explained already • Write a series of sentences to explain a flowchart or similar
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functions of sentence types: statement, command, exclamation or question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ explore titles of explanations texts and identify that they usually begin with 'how' or 'why' ○ write general statements to introduce topics being explained e.g. In the winter some animals hibernate • Expanded noun phrases to describe and specify (use of adjectives before the noun or preposition phrase after the noun) e.g. some hibernating animals, the adult male frog in the pond • Use of coordinating (and, or, but) and subordinating conjunctions (when, if, that, because) • Correct choice and use of present tense or past tense throughout the writing • Use of capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to demarcate sentences e.g. practice generating their own titles for explanations texts, for example, How do hedgehogs survive the winter? Why do we use bricks to build houses? • Commas to separate items in a list • Apostrophes for singular possession
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read explanations as a class, in groups and individually – learning and using new vocabulary • Comment on explanation texts (ease of understanding etc) • Create diagrams/flowcharts to help explain or use notes to summarise a process • Write a series of extended sentences to explain a process, including relevant details and an appropriate ending
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of prepositions (during, in, because of, before, after),) to express time, cause and place e.g. Hedgehogs make their nests under hedges and at the base of tree trunks. Hedgehogs build up their stores of fat during autumn. • Use of adverbs to express time, place and cause (then, next, soon, therefore) e.g. to show sequence, first, then, after that, finally • Use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (when, while, after, because, soon, while) to express time and cause e.g. '...because the temperature begins to drop', '...so the hedgehog looks for a safe place to sleep.' • Formation of subordinate clauses using subordinating conjunctions • Introduction of paragraphs as a way to group related information • Headings and subheadings to aid presentation and guide the reader • Use of present perfect instead of simple past (it has grown over two years rather than it grew over two years)

Year 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and analyse a range of explanatory texts, investigating and noting features • Distinguish between explanations and other types of non-fiction texts, even within the same book • Comment on and justify views about a range of explanation texts • Plan steps when writing own explanations and check all relevant information is included <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of a wider range of subordinating conjunctions • Noun phrases further expanded by adding adjectives and prepositions to modify the noun (e.g. When an animal dies, the soft part of the animal rots away. Millions of years later, the rock surrounding the skeleton rises to the Earth's surface) • Use of preposition phrases, subordinate clauses and noun phrases as fronted adverbials to indicate time, place, manner or frequency e.g. Millions of years later,... , When an animal or plant dies..., Consequently,... • Use of paragraphs to organise ideas around a theme e.g. use the first paragraph to introduce what you will be explaining. Organise following paragraphs according to the stages of the process. Conclude by addressing the reader. • Appropriate choice of pronoun (person or possessive) or noun, within and across sentences to aid cohesion and avoid repetition. Decide on an appropriate balance between nouns and pronouns to aid clarity. • Use of commas after fronted adverbials • Apostrophes for plural possession
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and analyse a range of explanatory texts, investigating and noting features, including those related to a range of curriculum areas • Teacher demonstration of how to plan and research a page for a reference book • In shared and independent writing, compose, edit and refine explanatory texts, focusing on clarity, conciseness and impersonal style • Use of relative clauses beginning with who, which, where, when, whose, that or an omitted relative pronoun e.g. use relative clauses to add an extra layer of information • Use of modal verbs to indicate degree of certainty • Precise use of preposition phrases, subordinate clauses and noun phrases as adverbials to indicate time, place, manner or frequency. • Devices to build cohesion within a paragraph (then, after, that, this, firstly) • Linking ideas across paragraphs using adverbials of time, place and number or tense choices • Brackets, dashes and commas to indicate parenthesis • Use of commas to clarify meaning or avoid ambiguity
Year 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose appropriate form and style of explanation to suit specific purpose and audience • Consider differences between historic explanations (in past tense) and those using the present tense • Investigate when different tenses are needed and apply in own writing of explanations • Use of the passive voice • Use of subjunctive form for formal writing • Use modal verbs to recommend and assert e.g. it might be advisable...it should be relatively easy to...there may be an opportunity to... • Precise use of a range of sentence structures for effect e.g. Use embedded phrases and clauses for succinctness e.g. The final stage, to be completed by June, will involve... • Use of a wider range of cohesive devices to link ideas across paragraphs: repetition of a word or phrase; use of a wider range of adverbials; ellipsis • Use of a range of layout devices to structure text: headings & subheadings; columns & bullet points; tables & diagrams