Progression in explanatory texts

Purpose

- To explain the processes involved in natural and social phenomena, or to explain how something works.

Explanation text is generally one in which a process is being explained, not just described. An explanation generally answers 'how' or 'why' questions and includes causes, motives or reasons. The verb 'explained', however, is often loosely used to mean 'report', for example, 'Explain what you did' generally means 'tell me or describe what you did' and may not have any reasons attached to it. The verb 'explain' is also used in place of 'define' so dictionary definitions are sometimes inaccurately categorised as explanation texts. (However, children's dictionaries are often a hybrid between a dictionary and an encyclopaedia so could reasonably be consulted for an explanation.)

Like all text types, variants of explanatory texts can occur and they can be combined with other text types.

Audience

Children should listen to, speak, read and write explanation texts for a wide range of audiences, varying language features and text structures to suit the audience and purpose.

Generic text structure

The structure of an explanation text is often (but not always):

- a general statement to introduce the topic, for example, *in the autumn some birds migrate*
- a series of logical steps explaining how or why something occurs, for example *because hours of daylight shorten…*
- steps continue until the final state is produced or the explanation is complete

Language features

The language features of an explanation text are often (but not always):

- written in simple present tense, for example, *many birds fly south*
- use connectives that signal time, for example, *then*, *next*, *several months later*
- use causal connectives, for example *because*, *so*, *this causes*

Knowledge for the writer

- decide whether diagrams, charts, illustrations or a flow chart would help to explain
- use a title that shows what you are writing about
- using how or why in the title helps. Try to make the title intrigue the reader, for example, *Why do sloths hang about?*
- use the first paragraph to introduce your subject to the reader
- organise the writing and illustrations to explain: what you need, how it works, why it works (cause and effect), when and where it works, and what it is used for
- add in extra, interesting information
- try to end by relating the subject to the reader
- if you use specialised terminology, a glossary may be needed
- interest the reader with exclamation, for example *Beware – whirlwinds can kill!* Or use questions: *Did you know that...?*
- draw the reader in, for example *strange as it may seem...*; *not many people know that...*,etc
- re-read your explanation, pretending to know nothing about the subject – is it clear?
- recognise that explanation texts can be adapted or combined with other text types depending on the audience and purpose

Progression is achieved through

- speaking and listening preceding reading and writing
- teacher modelling and scribing preceding children's independent attempt
- increased understanding by the children of the form and features of the text type
- increasing complexity, such as length, obscurity of task, additional features such as diagrams

Links to key aspects of learning

Units of work on explanation will involve children in using elements from all of the cross curricular, key aspects of learning explored in *Learning and Teaching in the Primary Years* - creative thinking, communication, empathy, enquiry , evaluation, information processing, managing feelings, motivation, problem solving, reasoning, self awareness and social skills.

In listening to, speaking, reading and writing explanation texts children will particularly use communication and:

- enquiry
  Example FS: ask questions and speculate
- information processing
  Example Y3: create diagrams such as flow charts to summarise or make notes of stages in a process
- reasoning
  Example Y3: explain … process orally using flowchart, language and gestures appropriately.
- evaluation
  Example Y6: Select the appropriate form of writing and style to suit a specific purpose and audience

Cross curricular links

Across the age phases many opportunities for exploring explanatory texts occur in all other of areas of the curriculum. For example:

- **science/ knowledge and understanding of the world (FS)**
  FS Stepping stone: examine objects and living things to find out more about them
  KS1 POS: use their scientific knowledge and understanding to explain observations
  KS2 POS: the effect of light, air, water and temperature on plant growth
- **history/ knowledge and understanding of the world (FS)**
  FS Stepping stone: find out about past and present events …
  KS1 POS: recognise why people did things, why events happened and what happened as a result
  KS2 POS: a study investigating how the locality was affected by a significant national or local event…

Guidance on curriculum choices which are supportive for bilingual learners is available in unit 3 of Excellence and Enjoyment: learning and teaching with bilingual children in the primary years.

Children with Special Educational Needs and/ or Learning Difficulties/ Disabilities

Learning objectives should be chosen which are related to the aspect on which the whole class is working. If with appropriate access strategies and support a child can not work towards the same learning objective as the rest of the class, teachers may want to track back to an earlier objective. The structure and the new electronic format of the renewed framework for literacy and mathematics support multi-level curriculum planning, and allow teachers to easily track back through a progression strand to locate earlier learning objectives. It also makes direct links to a wealth of other useful materials which will help to plan teaching and children's learning. Further guidance and principles on tracking back can be found in
Including all children in the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson: management guide Ref: 0465/.

Further useful references for children working significantly below age related expectations can be found in the QCA/DfES documents *Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties (QCA/01/736* www.nc.uk.net/ld and the *QCA DVD 'Using the P scales' QCA/05/1589.*

Planning for individual children or groups of children based on assessment for learning will be informed by knowledge of their priorities. For the majority of the time it will be appropriate for children to work on objectives that are similar and related to the whole class. However, at other times you will also have to consider whether the children have other priority needs that are central to their learning, for example a need to concentrate on some key skills.
For further guidance on planning for children with SEN/LDD see the library section and
Learning and teaching for children with special educational needs in the primary years ref 0302/2004 G
Teaching the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson in special settings.
Teaching the daily mathematics lesson for children with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties (DfES 0033/2003)

Children who are gifted and talented

Children who are working well above the overall level of their class or group will benefit from planning that may:

- add breadth (for example enrichment through a broader range of content, tasks and resources)
- increase depth (for example extension through complexity)
- accelerate the pace of learning by tracking forward to later objectives within or across key stages

The structure and the new electronic format of the renewed framework for literacy and mathematics, support multi-level curriculum planning, and allow teachers to easily track forward through a progression strand to locate later learning objectives. It also makes direct links to a wealth of other useful materials which will help to plan teaching and children's learning.
For further guidance on planning for gifted and talented children see the library section and www.nc.uk.net/gt/general/05_environment.htm.

Children learning English as an additional language (EAL)

Children learning EAL must be supported to access curriculum content while also developing cognitive and academic language within whole-class, group and independent contexts. With the exception of children learning EAL who also have SEN, it is critical to maintain a level of cognitive challenge which is consistent with that of the rest of the class. Children who are /have become conversationally fluent will continue to require explicit attention to the development of the academic language associated with the subject and of specific aspects within the subject. Planning should identify the language demands of the objectives and associated activities and making sure EAL learners know and can use the language demanded by the curriculum content of the unit/lesson then becomes an additional objective. In order to identify the language demands, teachers and practitioners should consider the language children will need to understand in order to access this activity, and the language they will need to be able to produce, either oral or written, in order to demonstrate success in achieving the learning intentions.

Children learning English as an additional language may require support in developing:

- accuracy in subject-verb agreements and use of prepositions, appropriate use of modals and range of determiners
- the use of academic and technical language with abstract nouns and nouns made from other word classes
- impersonal style and passive voice

For further guidance on planning for children learning EAL see the overview of planning for each year group, the library section and also *Learning and teaching for bilingual children in the primary years: Unit 1 Planning and Assessment for Language and Learning and Unit 2: Creating the Learning Culture, Making it work in the classroom*.

	Progression in explanatory texts *This progression should be considered in relation to progression in narrative as the study of non-fiction and fiction recounts complement each other.*
Foundation Stage	• Talk about why things happen and how things work; ask questions and speculate. • Listen to someone explain a process and ask questions. • Give oral explanations e.g. their or another's motives; why and how they made a construction.
Year 1	• Read captions, pictures and diagrams on wall displays and in simple books that explain a process. Draw pictures to illustrate a process and use the picture to explain the process orally.
Year 2	• After carrying out a practical activity, (e.g.) experiment, investigation, construction task) contribute to creating a flowchart or cyclical diagram to explain the process, as member of group with the teacher. After seeing and hearing an oral explanation of the process, explain the same process orally also using flowchart, language and gestures appropriately. • Read, with help, flowcharts or cyclical diagrams explaining other processes and then read others independently. • Following other practical tasks, produce a simple flowchart or cyclical diagram independently.
Year 3	• Create diagrams such as flow charts to summarise or make notes of stages in a process (e.g. in science, D&T or geography), ensuring items are clearly sequenced. • Explain processes orally, using these notes, ensuring relevant details are included and accounts ended effectively.
Year 4	• Read and analyse explanatory texts to identify key features. Distinguish between explanatory texts, reports and recounts while recognising that an information book might contain examples of all these forms of text or a combination of these forms • Orally summarise processes carried out in the classroom and on screen in flowcharts or cyclical diagrams as appropriate. • Contribute to the shared writing of an explanation where the teacher acts as scribe and models the use of paragraphs, connectives and the other key language and structural features appropriate to explanatory writing: – purpose: to explain a process or to answer a question – structure: introduction, followed by sequential explanation, organised into paragraphs – language features: usually present tense; use of connectives of time and cause and effect; use of passive voice – presentation: use of diagrams and other illustrations, paragraphing, connectives, subheadings, numbering • After oral rehearsal, write explanatory texts independently from a flowchart or other diagrammatic plan, using the conventions modelled in shared writing.
Year 5	• Read and analyse a range of explanatory texts, investigating and noting features of impersonal style: complex sentences; use of passive voice; technical vocabulary; use of words/phrases to make sequential, causal or logical connections. • Engage in teacher demonstration of how to research and plan a page for a reference book on one aspect of a class topic using shared note-making and writing of the page, using an impersonal style, hypothetical language (if...then, might, when the...) and causal and temporal connections (e.g. while, during, after, because, as a result, due to, only when, so) as appropriate. • In shared writing and independently plan, compose, edit and refine explanatory texts, using reading as a source, focusing on clarity, conciseness and impersonal style.
Year 6	• Choose the appropriate form of writing and style to suit a specific purpose and audience drawing on knowledge of different non-fiction text types. Use the language conventions and grammatical features of the different types of text, as appropriate.