

Supporting Learning Before, During, and After the Lesson

Week 1 – Pre-teaching Vocabulary and Concepts

Slide 1 – Title

Welcome to Week 1 of our new TA Sparks series, **Supporting Learning Before, During, and After the Lesson**.

Across this six-week series, we're going to think about the different ways teaching assistants can support learning at different points in the learning process — not simply once a pupil is already struggling with a task.

We're beginning with **pre-teaching vocabulary and concepts**.

This is about using a small amount of carefully targeted support *before* the main lesson to remove potential barriers and give pupils a stronger starting point.

The key idea throughout today's session is that pre-teaching shouldn't give pupils a different or easier curriculum.

It should help them access the **same ambitious learning as their peers**.

Slide 2 – Safeguarding Spark

Let's begin with today's safeguarding Spark.

During a short pre-teaching session, a pupil tells you they are often left at home alone in the evening while their parent goes out.

What should you do?

Take a moment to consider the four possible responses.

The correct answer is **C: listen calmly, record what the pupil has told you accurately and report the concern to the DSL in line with your school's safeguarding procedures**.

We don't know enough from this statement to determine exactly what is happening at home — and importantly, **we don't need to**.

Our role is not to investigate.

Slide 3 – Safeguarding Answer

If a pupil shares information like this, listen carefully and calmly.

Avoid asking investigative questions such as:

"How long are you left for?"

"How often does it happen?"

or:

"Where does your parent go?"

We also shouldn't contact the parent ourselves to try to establish what is happening.

Instead, record what the pupil has actually told you as accurately as possible and pass the information on through your school's safeguarding procedures.

The DSL can then consider factors such as the child's age, circumstances and any other information already known to the school.

The important principle is:

We notice. We listen. We record. We report.

We don't need to decide whether something meets a particular threshold before sharing a concern.

Slide 4 – Our Journey

This is our journey across the next six weeks.

Today we're starting with **pre-teaching vocabulary and concepts**.

Next, we'll look more broadly at preparing pupils for new learning.

We'll then consider how TAs can support pupils effectively during teacher input and during independent practice.

After that, we'll explore post-teaching and addressing misconceptions before finishing the series by thinking about how we help pupils connect learning across lessons.

So we're essentially following learning through its different stages:

Before the lesson. During the lesson. After the lesson.

And throughout, we'll keep returning to the same question:

How can TA support add value to high-quality classroom teaching rather than replace it?

Slide 5 – Success Criteria

By the end of today's session, there are four things we want to achieve.

Firstly, to **understand** why pre-teaching key vocabulary and concepts can help some pupils access classroom learning.

Secondly, to **recognise** the vocabulary and prior knowledge that might create barriers to understanding.

Thirdly, to **apply** some simple strategies for introducing and revisiting important vocabulary and concepts before a lesson.

And finally, to **reflect** on how pre-teaching can prepare pupils for learning without replacing the high-quality teaching that happens in the classroom.

Our aim is simple:

Prepare pupils to access the learning — not teach a different lesson.

Slide 6 – What Is Pre-Teaching?

Pre-teaching is a **short, focused opportunity** to introduce or revisit something a pupil is going to need in an upcoming lesson.

That could mean introducing an unfamiliar word.

It might mean revisiting something from previous learning that pupils need to understand what comes next.

We could explore an important concept using an image, object or example.

Or perhaps rehearse some of the language pupils will need to participate in the lesson.

The key words here are **short and focused**.

We're not trying to teach tomorrow's lesson today.

We're simply creating a small amount of familiarity.

So that when the teacher introduces the learning, instead of everything being completely new, the pupil has that valuable moment of recognition:

"I've seen this before. I know something about this."

That's the purpose of pre-teaching — **a head start, not a different destination**.

Slide 7 – Why Vocabulary Matters

Vocabulary can be a significant barrier to accessing learning.

Imagine joining a maths lesson and hearing:

"numerator, denominator, equivalent, fraction, simplify."

If several of those words are unfamiliar, you're not only trying to understand the mathematical concept.

You're simultaneously trying to work out the language being used to explain it.

And this happens everywhere.

In science, pupils encounter words such as *evaporation, habitat* and *organism*.

In history: *monarchy, invasion, settlement*.

In geography: *erosion, climate, population*.

And in English, even the language of the task itself — words such as *infer* or *evidence* — can create barriers.

So sometimes a pupil who appears not to understand the **learning** may actually be struggling to understand the **language of the learning**.

If pupils cannot access the language, they may struggle to access the learning.

Slide 8 – Which Words Should We Pre-Teach?

Of course, that doesn't mean we should identify every word a pupil might not know and teach all of them in advance.

That could quickly become overwhelming.

Instead, be selective.

Ask whether the word is **essential**.

Does the pupil actually need it to understand today's learning?

Is it **unfamiliar** or perhaps something they've encountered before but don't yet understand securely?

Is it **reusable**? Will they encounter this word repeatedly across the topic or curriculum?

And is it **conceptually important**? Does understanding this word unlock a bigger idea?

A really useful question is:

"If the pupil doesn't understand this word, will it stop them understanding the lesson?"

If the answer is yes, that word may be a strong candidate for pre-teaching.

The aim isn't **more vocabulary**.

It's identifying the **right vocabulary**.

Slide 9 – More Than Giving a Definition

Pre-teaching vocabulary needs to involve more than simply reading out a definition.

If I say:

"Evaporation means liquid turning into gas,"

a pupil might repeat that sentence perfectly.

But that doesn't necessarily mean they understand evaporation.

Instead, we want pupils to encounter the word in several meaningful ways.

First, **say it**. Let them hear and pronounce the word.

Then **explain it** using accessible, pupil-friendly language.

Show it through an image, action, object or example.

Connect it to something they already know.

Then encourage them to **use it** themselves.

And importantly, **revisit it** later.

We're trying to move pupils from simply recognising a definition towards actually developing a meaningful understanding of the word.

Vocabulary is learned through meaningful encounters — not one definition.

Slide 10 – A Simple Pre-Teaching Routine

This gives us a very simple routine that can be used again and again:

WORD → MEANING → EXAMPLE → USE

Let's take the word *erosion*.

First, the **word**.

Say *erosion* together. Make sure the pupil can hear it and pronounce it.

Then the **meaning**:

"Erosion is when rock or soil is gradually worn away."

Next, provide an **example**:

Waves repeatedly wearing away a cliff.

Then **use** the word in context:

"The waves caused erosion along the coastline."

And finally, return some thinking to the pupil:

"Can you give me another example of erosion?"

That's it.

It doesn't need to become a lengthy vocabulary intervention.

Short. Focused. Repeatable.

A routine like this also creates familiarity because pupils know how you're going to explore new vocabulary each time.

Slide 11 – Pre-Teach Concepts, Not Just Words

Sometimes vocabulary isn't actually the main barrier.

A pupil may know the word **democracy**.

They might even be able to give you a definition.

But that doesn't necessarily mean they understand the concept of democracy.

Likewise, a pupil may recognise the word **fraction** without really understanding the relationship between a whole and its parts.

So sometimes we need to pre-teach the **concept behind the vocabulary**.

We might use a visual or a concrete example.

A simple analogy.

A worked example.

We might connect it to prior knowledge or ask pupils to sort examples and non-examples.

But again, be careful about how much we're doing.

We're not trying to deliver the whole lesson in advance.

Teach enough of the concept to create a hook for the lesson.

Something the pupil can connect the teacher's explanation to when they encounter it again.

Slide 12 – Connect to What Pupils Already Know

This is another important part of effective pre-teaching.

New learning doesn't happen in isolation.

Pupils understand new ideas by connecting them to things they already know.

So before introducing something completely new, ask:

"What do you already know about this?"

"Where have you seen something like this before?"

"What does this remind you of?"

or:

"Which previous learning might help us?"

Then make the connection explicit.

For example:

"Yesterday we learned about _____. Today you're going to use that to understand _____."

That small sentence can help pupils see that learning isn't a collection of disconnected lessons.

One piece of knowledge helps us understand another.

Pre-teaching should build a bridge between previous learning and what comes next.

Slide 13 – Use Visuals and Concrete Examples

Some concepts become considerably easier when pupils can **see** what we're talking about.

So avoid relying solely on verbal explanation.

Use images.

Objects.

Diagrams.

Gestures.

Word maps.

Timelines.

Number lines.

Worked examples.

For example, before a geography lesson involving the word *migration*, we could show an image or simple diagram illustrating movement from one place to another.

Now the pupil has something concrete to attach the language to.

This can be particularly helpful when we're introducing abstract or unfamiliar concepts.

Rather than starting with a complicated definition, give pupils something meaningful to see, experience or connect with.

Meaning first. Vocabulary alongside it.

Slide 14 – Keep Pre-Teaching Short and Focused

This is an important caution.

Pre-teaching should **reduce barriers — not create another lesson.**

We don't need to teach everything in advance.

We shouldn't complete the task pupils are going to encounter later.

We don't want to simplify the curriculum unnecessarily.

And we certainly don't want to introduce so much information that the pupil becomes overloaded before the actual lesson has even begun.

Instead, keep it tight.

Perhaps:

Two to four key words.

One essential concept.

One useful connection to previous learning.

That's enough.

Sometimes five carefully focused minutes can achieve far more than twenty minutes of additional explanation.

The question isn't:

"How much can I teach before the lesson?"

It's:

"What's the smallest amount of preparation that will make the biggest difference to access?"

Slide 15 – The Classroom Pay-Off

This is where we see whether our pre-teaching has actually been useful.

Imagine the teacher begins:

"Today we're going to learn about erosion."

Without pre-teaching, that word might be completely unfamiliar.

The pupil is immediately trying to work out:

"What does erosion mean?"

while also trying to listen to everything else the teacher is explaining.

But after effective pre-teaching, they hear *erosion* and think:

"I know that word."

That familiarity matters.

It means they can devote more attention to listening to the teacher, making connections, asking questions, explaining ideas and applying their knowledge.

So the success of pre-teaching isn't really measured during the pre-teaching session.

The pay-off should be visible in the pupil's access and participation during the main lesson.

Slide 16 – Avoid Creating Dependence

This connects strongly with our previous TA Sparks series.

Pre-teaching should help pupils **participate more successfully in classroom teaching.**

It shouldn't become something they believe they must have before every lesson.

So ask yourself:

"Am I giving this pupil a useful starting point?"

Or:

"Am I teaching so much beforehand that they cannot access the lesson without me?"

Our direction of travel should remain:

PREPARE → PARTICIPATE → PRACTISE → INDEPENDENCE

Sometimes pupils will need ongoing pre-teaching.

That's absolutely appropriate where it is genuinely supporting access.

But the purpose isn't to make pupils dependent on additional adult teaching.

Successful pre-teaching should increase access to classroom teaching.

Slide 17 – Work With the Teacher

Effective pre-teaching shouldn't involve the TA trying to predict what might be useful.

Communication with the class teacher is essential.

Ask:

"What are the key words tomorrow?"

"What prior knowledge will pupils need?"

"Which concept is most important?"

"Where are pupils likely to struggle?"

and:

"What would be most useful for me to revisit beforehand?"

These are very short conversations.

But they make a huge difference.

If a TA has ten minutes available for pre-teaching, we want those ten minutes focused on the things that will have the greatest impact on the pupil's access to the lesson.

Five minutes of preparation can make ten minutes of pre-teaching far more purposeful.

The TA shouldn't have to guess what pupils need to be prepared for.

Slide 18 – ⚡ Spark Forward

Here's our small Spark for this week.

Choose **one upcoming lesson** where a pupil you support might benefit from pre-teaching.

Before the lesson, identify:

Three key words

and

One essential concept.

Spend a few minutes introducing them using today's routine:

WORD → MEANING → EXAMPLE → USE

Then don't just evaluate how the pre-teaching session went.

Watch what happens **in the actual lesson**.

Does the pupil recognise the vocabulary?

Do they engage more quickly?

Do they contribute?

Do they appear more confident?

Can they connect what the teacher is saying with what they encountered beforehand?

And ask yourself:

Did familiarity change how confidently they accessed the learning?

Slide 19 – Final Reflection

Before we finish, take a moment to reflect on your own practice.

Which pupils might benefit most from **carefully targeted** pre-teaching?

How effectively do you currently identify the vocabulary that could create barriers?

When you introduce new vocabulary, are you connecting it to things pupils already know?

And finally, think about communication.

How could teachers and TAs work together to make pre-teaching more purposeful?

Then complete the sentence:

"One change I will make to pre-teaching this week is..."

As always with our Sparks, don't try to change everything.

Choose one practical change you can actually put into action.

Slide 20 – Evidence & Research

Today's session draws particularly on the Education Endowment Foundation's evidence around the effective use of teaching assistants, supporting pupils with SEND, literacy and oral language.

A particularly important principle for us is that TA support should **supplement high-quality classroom teaching rather than replace it**.

That is exactly what effective pre-teaching should achieve.

We're not creating a parallel curriculum for pupils who need additional support.

We're identifying specific barriers — perhaps unfamiliar vocabulary, insecure prior knowledge or a difficult concept — and providing enough preparation to help the pupil access what happens next.

The evidence around literacy and oral language also reinforces the importance of explicitly developing pupils' language and giving them meaningful opportunities to encounter and use vocabulary.



The links on the slide provide useful further reading if you'd like to explore these areas in more detail.

Slide 21 – Final Thought

We'll finish with the message on your final slide:

Pre-teaching isn't about making the lesson easier. It's about making the lesson more accessible.

That's an important distinction.

We're not lowering the destination.

We're not removing challenge.

And we're not teaching an easier version of the curriculum.

We're simply asking:

What might prevent this pupil accessing tomorrow's learning — and is there something small we can do beforehand to reduce that barrier?

Perhaps it's three words.

Perhaps it's one image.

Perhaps it's reconnecting them with something they've learned previously.

Sometimes a very small amount of carefully targeted preparation can make a significant difference when that pupil walks into the lesson.

Prepare before. Participate during. Become more independent over time.