

# Developing prior knowledge

Throughout the programme so far we have emphasised the importance of prior knowledge. In module 2, you explored the importance of considering prior knowledge when planning how much information to introduce. In module 3, you explored how to support pupils to activate or draw upon prior knowledge when working independently by modelling using 'Think Aloud'. In module 4, you explored how to use assessment to check for prior knowledge and identify possible misconceptions. In this session, you will explore how to develop pupils' prior knowledge through pre-teaching.

Prior knowledge is important for learning for all pupils but especially those with additional learning needs because:

- **It reduces working memory load** – pre-teaching enables the teacher to further break content down into smaller steps which helps prevent working memory overload.
- **New knowledge is learnt by attaching to existing knowledge** – if pupils don't have any knowledge of the material being taught, it is much harder for them to process and remember new information.

Therefore, pupils with poor prior knowledge are at risk from being unable to access the material you are teaching. You can reduce this risk through pre-teaching.

## Pre-teaching

Pupils' prior knowledge can be developed in a variety of ways, but this session will focus on pre-teaching. Pre-teaching is when pupils are taught key information prior to it being taught in a lesson. Pre-teaching provides pupils with essential foundational knowledge that they can draw upon during a lesson. This is likely to increase the pupils' attention, focus and motivation.

## How do you identify pupils' levels of prior knowledge?

Before you teach a topic, it is important that you assess a pupil's prior knowledge and current understanding. As Katherine suggests in her video, this can be done by considering what pupils have already covered earlier on in the curriculum. However, just because pupils have been taught something, it does not mean they have retained that knowledge. We know from our understanding of how pupils learn, that information needs to be revisited in order to be retained. Therefore, you should be careful when making assumptions about pupils' prior knowledge and where possible, assess pupils' current level of understanding in a topic. This will help you to identify which pupils require pre-teaching before a topic or lesson.

Often, you will already know which pupils will benefit from pre-teaching based on your understanding of your pupils and your experience of working with them throughout the academic year.

## Identifying material to pre-teach

When identifying what material to pre-teach, you will need to have secure subject knowledge and a good understanding of pupils' needs. Therefore, it can be helpful to work with colleagues such as a subject or phase lead and your Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO).

When planning content to pre-teach, you should follow the same principles as you would when planning explanations during a lesson. Information should be broken down into small chunks and made memorable to avoid working memory overload. Pre-teaching should be an extension of the teaching sequence, breaking down the foundational knowledge into even smaller steps. Therefore, key vocabulary or facts that will be present during the lesson can be a good focus for a pre-teaching session. The example below demonstrates what this might look like in practice.



### Example:

If teaching a lesson on the Ancient Egyptians, the key vocabulary or facts that might be identified for pre-teaching are:

- Egypt
- Ancient Egyptians
- Tomb
- Tutankhamun
- Pyramid
- Hieroglyphics
- Shaduf

For best effect, the words above should be accompanied with a graphical representation to support pupil understanding.

[\(this link opens in a new window/tab\)](#)