

How do you present complex issues in a way that children can understand?

10 TIPS FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING

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1. Define (explanatory) goal

- Define a clear explanatory goal: formulate a precise question from a child's perspective (e.g.: "If countries have too little money, why don't they just print more?")

2. Reduce content

- Reduce the content of what you are explaining, and whenever possible, only explain one issue. The question "What do I want to explain?" also implies the question: "What am I not explaining?"
- Reducing stimuli also makes it easier for children to understand general correlations.
- We can only process knowledge consciously if we can clearly perceive it with our eyes and ears. And we can only process these 2 codes at the same time if the information being presented is not dense.
- Less is more!

3. Structure the sequences

- Clear thread: Use patterns that the viewers are familiar with from their everyday lives, as these ensure clarity when explaining, e.g., through the logical, chronological, hierarchical, technical, deductive, or inductive structure of the explanatory text.
- Small steps and summaries make it easier for viewers to understand while providing orientation and structure.

- Overall structure: The sequences should slowly build on one another and not surprise or confuse viewers (to do justice to viewers' differing levels of previous knowledge).

4. Arouse interest (and maintain it)

- Tell stories: Dramaturgy enables a narrative/an explanation that speaks to the viewers' emotions and arouses interest in how the story ends.
- Personalise: Personalisation encourages viewers to identify with the narrative, thereby improving their understanding. The more children can identify with what is being portrayed, the more they will understand the explanation.
- A narrative storyline promotes interest and understanding, while an impersonal statement of several facts puts viewers off.
- Encourage children's curiosity, e.g., by asking questions from a child's perspective: If interest first has to be aroused, then often it is enough to pose an intriguing question that challenges what children know to be true (and later explains how everything fits together).
- Continue topics: Children demand a continuation of topics. They develop empathy with the people affected and want to know how a story continues or ends.

- Do not overwhelm viewers, but also do not underwhelm them.
- Look at topics from multiple perspectives.
- Switch up informative and emotional elements.

5. Change perspectives: Connect with the daily lives of the target group

- Connect with children's experiences and explanatory models: Children have already gained a great deal of experience. New information is integrated into the existing cognitive system and previous knowledge. That is where the narrative needs to pick up: When examples are drawn from their daily lives, children understand contexts better.
- Connect with children's behavioural patterns: Children have fixed moral standards and values, according to which they categorise occurrences in their environment (e.g., fair/unfair, well cared for/helpless, powerful/weak). Explanations should use these standards and values as a starting point.
- Comparisons/analogies can make it easier for children to understand. However, suitable analogies are often difficult to find. It is important to successfully make the switch back to the "real" world: "So far everything between x and y has been like voting for a student council. But now..."



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Ill. 1: Images have a more powerful effect than words

- Whether the viewers understand the explanation depends on whether they can connect with it, that is, whether the new information complements their existing knowledge.

6. Formulate precise texts

- The text must be easy to listen to.
- Simple, short sentences: Whenever possible, only introduce one piece of information in each sentence.
- The text needs to have a clearly recognisable structure (logical steps).
- Sentences should have a theme-rheme pattern: In the first part of the sentence, existing knowledge is mentioned, and in the second part of the sentence, the new information is added.
- Simple words: No terms that the target group is unfamiliar with. Do not set terms, instead explain them.
- Use verbs: Use action verbs whenever possible.
- Create redundancies by using the same words.
- Give summaries and overviews.
- Do not use irony!

7. Develop a clear visual language

- The images used should be abstracted to what is absolutely necessary.
- Use only clear elements on the visual level: Images must be easily recognisable and children must be

able to easily understand and interpret them.

- Graphics, symbolic pictograms and neutral explanatory figures make it easier for children to understand and contribute to making emotional content more factual (war, terror, illness, etc.).
- Understandable structure and narrative: Pictures usually have a direction (the reading direction) that can be used for narrative or spatial orientation and interpretation. The pictures must lead the viewers such that they can then understand the text. A graphic should develop step by step when possible, and, together with the text, should follow a clear sequence.
- Images always have a more powerful effect than words (Ill. 1)!

8. Align text and images

- Images can be thought of as the door for understanding a text. Their effects are stronger, more emotional and more direct than the effects of text and are closely linked to personal experiences.
- All key elements should be included in the text and image: Only when images support what the text is saying (and vice-versa) will the viewers be able to understand the message. Textual information that is not included in the image is usually not perceived.

- The text must give an answer to the questions that arise from the image. Images should be addressed directly (e.g., “What is coloured green here ...”) if the identification is not absolutely clear.
- The relationship between the image and reality should be clarified or viewers should be reminded of it (e.g., “Like you can see here in the model ...”).
- Text-image gap: Differences between the text and images cause confusion.

9. Adjust speed

- Keep the speech rate low: If you explain too quickly, you will lose viewers.
- The text structure should also be heard in speech: Pauses should be included explicitly in the script.
- The melody should be more like that heard in narratives than in the news.
- Avoid over-accentuating.
- Passages with difficult content might need redundancies.

10. Review message

- Check whether the explanatory goals were achieved. After all, intending an effect is not the same as achieving it, and just because something has been said or explained does not mean it has been understood. Different people perceive the same content in different ways.
- Always get feedback from your audience! ■

THE AUTHOR

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