Use Elaboration to Define or Explain Terms and Ideas

1. Focus

Explain Elaboration

Say: Some informational report topics are more complex than others. When you write about a complex topic, you want to make sure your readers understand the terms you use and the ideas you discuss. One way to do that is through elaboration, or adding details such as explanations or definitions to a sentence. For example, consider this sentence: “To cure his disease, surgeons operated on his corpus callosum.” You may be wondering, what in the world is a corpus callosum? In this case, the author actually added a definition to the end of the sentence: “an organ deep in the middle of the brain.” So, you can see how elaboration can help readers understand unfamiliar terms. It’s also a good way to vary your sentences. Today I’m going to show you how to elaborate by adding explanations or definitions to sentences.

Model Elaboration

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for sentences with added details as you read the passage from “Right Brain, Left Brain” aloud.

The right brain sees the world in a nonlogical, intuitive way. That means it typically relies on hunches—what some people call gut feelings—to understand what is going on.

Modeling Text

Say: In this passage, the word hunches may not be unknown to readers, but the author adds an explanation to the sentence to develop the idea. Some people may understand the idea of gut feelings better than hunches. Placing the dependent clause “what some people call gut feelings” between dashes in the middle of the sentence makes the sentence more interesting and helps to vary the sentence structure in the paragraph.
2. Rehearse

Practice Elaboration

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

It’s important to eat healthy foods every day.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with partners to revise the sentence using elaboration, adding an explanation about or definition of healthy foods. Pairs should write down their sentence and be prepared to read it to the class and explain what they added and why.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentence and explain how they changed it. Discuss how the elaboration makes the sentence clearer and more interesting. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they draft or revise their informational reports.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that we can define terms or explain concepts in sentences through elaboration. Elaboration can also help you add variety to your sentence structures. As you draft and revise your informational reports, look for terms that need definition or ideas that need explanation, and elaborate to help readers understand the topic.

Encourage students to identify terms and ideas in their reports that may require elaboration. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite two or three students who explained terms and concepts effectively in their reports to share examples with the class.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Focus on helping beginning ELs say and write complete sentences. Display a photograph using the interactive whiteboard resources or a photo you have selected in Advanced Preparation. Encourage students to look at the details of the photograph and orally compose a complete sentence about one detail. Help them write their sentences on paper. Invite them to describe other details in the photo.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: details/los detalles; elaboration/la elaboración.