Explanations

What are explanations and why do we write them?

Explanations are written to give an account of how and why things occur, particularly within science and technology.

What are the different forms of explanations?

1. Sequential explanations that explain how, for examples: How does a refrigerator work?
2. Causal explanations that explain why, for example: Why do plants need nutrients to grow?

What structure is needed in an explanation?

An explanation includes:

1. A statement of phenomenon - This introduces the reader to what is to be explained. It may take the form of a definition, and sometimes includes background information about the topic.
2. An explanation sequence - This includes additional details about what happens.
3. A concluding statement - This concludes the explanation.
4. Visual images - These can accompany the text in the form of diagrams and flow charts.

What are the main language features?

- Language of cause/effect, for example: Heavy rain causes floods.
- Language to indicate time/sequence, for example: Soon after, the water will boil.
- Language of condition, for example: If it rains heavily, there will be a flood.
- Technical language. This language is written specifically to relate to the topic, for example: floods, hail, storm, monsoons, etc.

What other features are there?

- Descriptive language, for example: The river is makes up a wide space surrounding deep below the mountain ranges.
- Nominalisation, for example: The water washes away the soil and the roots of the tree are exposed ⇒ Erosion causes the roots of the trees to be exposed.
- Language of generalisation, for example: Some river banks are formed by...
- Timeless present tense, for example: The water evaporates as the sun warms the surface.

What skills are needed and developed when writing explanations?

Researching, interpreting visual images and displays, taking notes, and summarising.

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