

Explanation

Operational definition: Explaining or exposing is the discursive activity of making concepts, processes, or phenomena understood, clarified, or made known; it is based on the referential function of language since its communicative objective is to inform through definitions, examples, illustrations, or clarifications. The communicative relationship between the one who explains and the one who receives the explanation is asymmetrical; therefore, this discursive sequence aims to achieve balance or reduce asymmetry among those participating. Its main characteristics are objectivity, neutrality, and truthfulness, facilitating understanding for the recipient.

Structure Elements

According to Calsamiglia and Tusón (2012), the basic structure of the explanation is:

1. Introduction to the topic or framing
2. Mention of the main idea
3. Explanation of the topic based on shared knowledge, including definitions, comparisons, examples, analogies, clarifications (or reformulations), and chronologies, among other discursive strategies
4. Synthesis of the most relevant ideas

FRAMING	MAIN IDEA	EXPLANATION	CLOSING
Description of the context or situation observed	Idea that expresses the axis of the explanation	Evidence that makes the central theme of the explanation understandable	Summary of the most important ideas

Discourse Markers to Introduce Explanations

Discourse markers are words that serve or guide the meaning of shared ideas. In the construction of explanatory sequences, the following are usually used:

CAUSE	because, since
CONSEQUENCE	therefore, so, consequently, as a result
COMPARISON	unlike, like, similarly, compared to
EXEMPLIFICATION	for example, as a sample, an illustrative case, including, in particular
CLARIFICATION	that is, in other words, in summary

Linguistic Resources to Explain


RESOURCE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
CLARIFICATION	Verbal introduction of an explanation intended to facilitate understanding of a concept, procedure, or idea	“Except for the states of Sinaloa, Durango, and Coahuila, the eclipse on April 8, 2024, can be seen in Mexico as a partial eclipse of different magnitudes, that is, different degrees of coverage of the Sun. For example, in Mexico City, it will be 79 % or magnitude 0.79” (Flandes, 2024).
ANALOGY	Verbal relationship of similarity between concepts, procedures, or ideas of different kinds	“For Macario and Dorotea, what piercers and tattoo artists do seem like a technique to beautify the body, but at a microscopic level in the skin, a silent orchestra of responses is unleashed from the beginning” (Mastache-Maldonado & Echánove-Cuevas, 2024).
DEFINITION	Verbal delimitation of a concept, procedure, or idea whose intention is to expose its generic and differential characteristics	“Visible light is a very small part of the electromagnetic spectrum, constituting a complex phenomenon. It is composed of photons that have wave properties (like waves in the sea) and particles (like a marble) that carry a defined energy” (Colorado Peralta & Rivera, 2015).
EXEMPLIFICATION	Demonstration with examples of what is said	“It is not extraordinary that partial eclipses separated by intervals ‘...of a few months or even years can be seen from the same point on the planet’s surface. For example, the annular eclipse of October 14, 2023, was seen as a partial eclipse in Mexico City and the same will happen with the one on April 8, 2024, just six months later” (Flandes, 2024).
ILLUSTRATION	Demonstration with graphic elements or illustrations of what is being said	<p>“After the cochlea, the information travels through the auditory nerve to the central nervous system (see Figure 1)” (Merchant and Mendoza, 2024).</p>  <p>The diagram illustrates the auditory pathway in five stages, connected by downward arrows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oído Externo Medio Interno (External, Middle, Internal Ear) Tallo cerebral (Brainstem), including Núcleos cocleares, Oliva superior, and Lemnisco lateral. Cerebro medio (Midbrain), including Colículo inferior. Diencéfalo (Diencephalon), including Tálamo auditivo. Corteza cerebral (Cerebral Cortex), including Corteza auditiva primaria (A1) and Cortezas auditivas secundarias.
RHETORICAL QUESTION	Asking questions without expecting a response to emphasize a point or articulate different parts of a text or speech	“In this culinary metaphor in which the popularizer is a chef, what would science be? What would the scientist be? Would he be the owner of the restaurant? Could he be the author of the recipe? No sir. If the popularizer is the chef and his article is the prepared breasts, then science

Figura 1. La vía auditiva.

and the scientist are... the chicken” (De Régules, 2024).

LOGICAL
SEQUENCE

Orderly presentation of the events in a timeline to make the evolution of a concept, procedure, or idea understandable

The composting process involves the decomposition of organic matter in the presence of oxygen. In the first stage, microorganisms, such as fungi and bacteria, decompose organic waste, converting it into compost. Then, anaerobic digestion or bio-methanolation is carried out, where the waste is transformed into biogas, which can be employed to generate heat and electrical energy (Repsol, 2023).

Recommendations

1. Know your audience so you can adapt your message to them in the best possible way: preparing an explanation for a school student is not the same as for a university student.
2. Establish the focus of the explanation to maintain attention on the selected object or topic.
3. Organize the information to create a logical and coherent text or speech; going from the most general idea to the most particular thought is optimal.
4. Establish an appropriate balance between techno-scientific terminology and the corresponding explanations.
5. Incorporate examples, analogies, definitions, and illustrative situations... so that your text or explanatory speech is more accessible.
6. Join the ideas with discourse markers to establish logical relationships between them.
7. Prefer precise and unambiguous language that facilitates understanding of the topic.
8. Review and edit your explanation to eliminate redundancies and simplify the formulation of ideas as much as possible.

Summary

- Explanation is a discursive activity that seeks to make concepts, processes, or phenomena understandable.
- The explanation is based on the referential function of language to inform objectively, neutrally, and truthfully..
- The structure of the explanation is as follows: framing or contextualization, main idea, explanation, and synthesis.
- Discourse markers, which guide the meaning of ideas, are usually used to introduce explanations: cause, consequence, comparison, exemplification, and clarification.
- Some linguistic resources most used in the explanatory sequence are analogy, definition, exemplification, illustration, rhetorical question, and logical sequence.
- The expectation in an explanatory sequence is that techno-scientific and standard or plain language will be used evenly to facilitate the understanding of the concepts, procedures, or ideas shared.

To Learn More

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De Régules, S. (2024, March). Pásele a la cocina. *¿Cómo ves?* 304.

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