10 ways to explain things more effectively

1. **Keep in mind others' point of view.** You've probably seen the famous illusion that looks like either a young woman or an old woman. Two people can look at that same picture, and they can have opposite views of what they're seeing. Keep this idea in mind when explaining a concept. Something that might be perfectly understandable to you might be incomprehensible to someone else.

2. **Listen and respond to questions.** It's easy to become annoyed when someone is asking questions sometimes. However, try to resist that reaction. A better attitude is to be happy that the other person is interested enough to ask questions. To minimize confusion and misunderstanding, try to paraphrase or summarize a question before you answer it. This is important to let the person know they were being heard and understood. It is particularly important in a group setting to repeat the question.

3. **Avoid talking over student's head or talking down to them.** When you explain things to people, do their eyes glaze over? Chances are it's because you're talking over their head. Avoid the other extreme as well. Don't insult people by assuming that they do not know.

4. **Ask questions to determine student's understanding.** The students you're talking to shouldn't be the only ones asking questions. You should be asking questions as well, to make sure they understand. Your questions should be open ended, which gives people a chance to provide detailed information. An example of an open-ended question would be “Can you show me how you do XYZ or “Help me to understand what happens here.” Questions tell students that you're interested that they understand and you are listening to them. Remember to avoid asking “why?”

5. **Take it step by step.** Make information digestible by breaking it up into small bites. Big gulps of information cause explanation indigestion.

6. **Use direct eye contact.** Direct eye contact is an indication to most people that what you're saying is important. Their reaction is, "I'd better pay attention!" Paying attention to an explanation is a good thing.

7. **Use analogies to make concepts clearer.** An analogy involves explaining an unfamiliar concept in terms of a familiar one. First figure out the general principle you're trying to explain. Then, choose something from real life that illustrates that principle that will be of interest to the student. As an example you can use skateboard or surfing as analogies in Physics and Geometry.

8. **Verify understanding.** Check for understanding often with appropriate questions such as, "Am I making sense?" or "Would you like me to go over that one time again?"

9. **Use visuals.** Some people absorb information most efficiently by receiving it aurally, other through visual means. It often makes sense to present some kind of visual explanation in addition to a spoken explanation to make sure the information is registering in the student’s mind.

10. **Confirm that your explanation makes sense.** Once you've finished explaining your point or answering a question, ask a final question yourself. Make sure the people who heard your explanation truly did understand it. Consider asking them to give you the explanation in their own words, just to double-check.