# Knowledge by Modality

## You cannot make meaning of what you know nothing about.

Knowledge is the ground meaning stands on. The more a person already knows about the world, the less has to be spelled out. Knowledge is not a nice extra; it is the **raw material of understanding**.

### Reading

What a reader already knows about a topic can matter more than their general reading level. Knowledge is what turns decoded words into a scene a reader can picture, understand, and reason about. That scene is a mental model, built from what the reader brings as much as from the words themselves, and it is the model, not the sentences, that a reader remembers and reasons with afterward.

### Writing

Writers work from knowledge in two directions: they need enough of their own to have something worth saying, and they have to judge what a reader already knows so they can leave the right things unsaid. Aim too far above or below that, and the text breaks down; hit it, and the reader supplies the missing links without noticing.

### Listening

Speech moves fast and can't be replayed, so a listener leans on what they already know to keep pace, filling a speaker's shorthand and anticipating where the talk is headed. Familiar material is understood faster and with less effort (fluency), which is why unfamiliar ground can make speech hard to follow, even when it is slow and clear.

### Speaking

Speakers rely on common ground, the knowledge they assume they share with a listener, to say a lot with a little. We tune every sentence to what the other person already knows, and when we misjudge it, the same words that would inform an expert leave a newcomer lost.

**Knowledge is not a nice extra. It is what meaning is made of.**