

Developmental Area:	Receptive Language
Skill Strand:	Auditory Memory for Understanding
Skill Phase:	Systematic Preparation
Skill Step:	I follow instructions at four-word-level with familiar nouns.

You may be wanting to facilitate this skill step with most of your children if you are considering targeted skill progression and creating firm foundations for progression. You may want to facilitate this skill step with just a few children or with an individual target child as this is their next step.

Whatever the reason, this Practical Ideas Sheet will help you to reflect on your current practice and maybe to get some new ideas. Where possible, the practical ideas are grouped into the three layers of your practice.

General Principles to Consider

Over time you will become more familiar with the word-level of instructions and things you are saying. However, whether you are embedding these into your interactions or planning a more focussed activity, there are some key things that you need to remember:

- **Withdraw visual support** - As you are giving the instruction, don't point to or look directly at the things you are asking the child to find or use. Ensure the child is using receptive language skills and not just watching you. Of course, if the child struggles, support the child by pointing and helping out. However, don't do this straight away. This is tricky as we often use non-verbal support automatically and it is part of our good practice. However, in this skill-building instance, we need to momentarily take that non-verbal support away.
- **Use Vocabulary the child knows** - Ensure that the child knows any nouns, verbs or concepts you are using within the instruction. Generally stick with more familiar vocabulary that you know the child knows. The focus of this skill step and your interventions is to build auditory memory for understanding. Where you do need to add and teach new vocabulary, the new words need to be used in shorter sentences and repeated more so that the words can be learnt. Here, you are building the amount of language a child can process, hence the need for them to already understand the words within the instruction.
- **Ensure there is a choice** - If you are dropping in a four-word-level instruction such as, "Put the **spoon** on the **plate** and the **egg** in the **pan**" you will need to make sure that there are more than these four objects there. If there were only those four things, the child would have to understand your instruction using their receptive language skills. However, without the choice, the instruction would not be as difficult as we think and would not actually be at four-word-level.

This last consideration is much easier when you are planning more focussed activities and you can think about the resources you need for a given task as you have more control. It also means that, sometimes, what you think are four-word-level instructions within your interactions are actually simpler than you think as all of the choice elements are not present. In such situations, don't worry about it too much.

You will still be building auditory and receptive language skills. However, do strongly consider this final element when planning activities.

Interactions & Targeted Use of the Learning Environment and Daily Routines

Creating opportunities to build this skill within interactions will involve you dropping-in instructions for the child to do something with the objects around them. Broadly, this might involve asking the child to put something somewhere or to find or pass you certain things.

If this is being done within play, you need to be careful to not drop-in too many instructions and make things too adult-led. Ideally, the instructions should make sense in the context of what you are doing or playing. This way the play and the conversations keep going and the child has no idea that you are embedding interventions!

It may help, as part of the upskilling process, to take an area of your provision at a time and think - what are the possibilities for an instruction for this skill step within this area? Of course, you will need to be flexible in order to fit these into play. However, the act of thinking and talking this through can help make things become automatic more quickly.

Although you can include verbs within Instructions, it is easier to think about your main words being nouns. You can include verbs as a main word but the factor of choice makes this a little bit more difficult to consider. Your instructions will have to reflect your own learning environment but the main structures might be:

- **Pass me the A, B, C and D** - This format is asking the child to understand 4 nouns and find the correlating objects or pictures from a small choice of objects or pictures. A choice of 6 or 7 objects or pictures would be about right and would not be too overwhelming. As mentioned before, the child will need to know the vocabulary for A, B, C & D. Although you would not point to the objects/pictures as you ask for them, hold out your hand so that the child already knows you want them to give you something.
- **Point to the A, B, C & D** - This is very similar to the above. You might want to have a turn first to indicate what is expected in terms of pointing. This instruction type can also be used when looking at slightly busier pictures together. There will need to be more than 4 things depicted in the picture. However, a very busy picture might be too overwhelming and create too high a demand from a visual discrimination as well as a time point of view. Start with a slightly simpler picture first and then make them slightly busier to increase demand with Auditory memory for Understanding and Visual Discrimination as and when the child demonstrates progress.
- **Put the A in/on the B and the C in/on the D** - An instruction like this might be, "Put the brick in the box and the ball in the basket" or "Put the **spoon** on the **plate** and the **egg** in the **pan**." In both instances the position words 'in' and 'on' did not count as key words as they describe what we would naturally do with objects and those containers of locations. The 4 key words are, therefore the nouns.
- **Put the A and the B in/on the C and give me the D** - This follows the same principles as the above but, this time, you are putting 2 objects in one location. Put your hand out to indicate the "give me" part of the instruction for the fourth key word.
- **Action the A to the B and action the C to the D** - An example of this instruction might include, with the vehicles, " Drive the **bus** to the **house** and the **car** to the **school**."

Within interactions, don't worry too much. You are most likely to sometimes make instructions easier than you think. At least you are not making them too hard. The trick is, have a go and you will still be building skill through your targeted practice.

Focussed Activities: Things to Consider

It is much easier to get the word-level exactly right if you are gathering resources together to carry out a focussed activity. You will have more control over the vocabulary, ensuring that there is a choice but not too much choice and also having a little more time to think about and plan your instructions.

Ideally, use resources from your learning environment. This way you will be building skills around the resources they use at other times rather than isolated vocabulary. This will make skills easier to transfer for both you and the child. It also means that you don't need to buy anything else. You have everything you need already.

Activities at this level are likely to be done with small groups of children. If this is the case, you are most likely to ask the children to take turns, giving each child an instruction for their turn to do something with the objects you have.

If you have children at different levels with this skill, you will need to plan for this. You will need to know which child is at which level and what the different instructions are for these levels. This way you can differentiate things but the children all think they are doing the same thing.

You can plan activities where each child has a set of the same objects and then they act on your instruction every time you give one. It is more difficult to differentiate this way and it can be more difficult to monitor who understood it all and who did not. However, it does mean that the children end up having more turns compared with when you are going round the circle.

It is essential that you monitor progress so closely. If a child is consistently understanding at this level, do you need to move them on to a later skill step to ensure ongoing progression? If a child is finding it tricky is this all of the time or is it inconsistent? If a child finds it tricky all of the time, even with familiar vocabulary that you know they know, you are likely to need to backtrack to an earlier skill step.

If the child is inconsistent, is this a vocabulary issue when you use certain objects? If this is the case, you will need to use different vocabulary to build this skill step but also support the child to learn that vocabulary outside of this task. Inconsistency might also be because the child is in the process of acquiring this skill step but they still need more practice before it is fully established. Ensure a child has a skill consistently before moving on.

Focussed Activities: Some ideas

It would be possible to write a book of ideas of games, just for this skill step. Basically, you can plan instructions using the example structures given above and then gather the resources you need accordingly.

However, here are some ideas to get you started:

Activity Example 1

Objects - car, bus, train, lorry , and something to represent a house, garage and school.

Positioning - I put the garage, school and house away from the vehicles to act as locations. I put the vehicles in front of us, in no particular order. After each turn, the vehicle used must be moved back to the starting position to keep the level of choice the same.

Instructions could be:

- Drive the **bus** to the **house** and the **car** to the **school**.
- Drive the **lorry** to the **garage** and the **bus** to the **school**.

Activity Example 2

Objects - Plate, pan, bowl and box along with an apple, bread, banana (or other food of your choice from the home corner.)

Positioning - I put the food slightly away from the other things which are going to act as places for the food to be put. After each turn, the item of food used must be moved back to the starting position to keep the level of choice the same.

Instructions could be:

- Put the **banana** on the **plate** and the **apple** in the **bowl**.
- Put the **apple** and **bread** in the **pan** and give me the **plate**.

Activity Example 3

Combine small-world with drawing (either a large piece of paper on the floor, spread over a table or when chalking on the floor.)

With 4 small-world minibeasts such as butterfly, spider, caterpillar and ladybird (as long as the children have this vocabulary) chalk or draw a flower, a leaf and a stone. Name these drawings and make sure that children know the location vocabulary.

Instructions could then be:

- Sit the **ladybird** on the **flower** and the **spider** on the **leaf**.
- Sit the **spider** and the **butterfly** on the **leaf** and give me the **spider**.

After each turn, the creatures should be put back to the starting position.

Activity Example 4

From your animal collection choose 3 or 4 animals that the children know and then use something to represent a **field**, a **barn** and a **trailer**. These locations could be items from your farmyard resources or drawn as described in the example above.

Instructions could be:

- Put the **pig** in the **barn** and the **horse** in the **field**.
- Put the **horse** and the **cow** in the **trailer** and give me the **pig**.