

<b>Developmental Area:</b>	Receptive Language
<b>Skill Strand:</b>	Auditory Memory for Understanding
<b>Skill Phase:</b>	Systematic Preparation
<b>Skill Step:</b>	I follow instructions at three-word-level including early colour, size or position concepts.

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** - This is the more complex one to consider when dropping-in instructions or when planning activities. For this skill step, if you were asking the child to "pass me the **green spoon** and a **cup**," you would, ideally, need to make sure that there was also a spoon of a different colour. This would make sure that 'green' **MUST** be understood. Ideally, you would also want to make sure that there was another green object, maybe something like a green plate in order to ensure that 'spoon' **MUST** be understood. Ideally, you would need to make sure that the spoon and the cup weren't the only things there to make sure that 'cup' **MUST** be understood. However, you need to make sure that there is not too much choice and that the task isn't too overwhelming.

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 three-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.

Instructions will have to reflect your own learning environment but some example structures might be:

- Put X under Y - The child would need to understand under already.
- Put X in/on Y - The child would have to understand in or on already. Also, if you said, put the apple on the plate, 'on' would not count in this instance as we automatically put things on plates.
- Pass me the colour X and the Y - This is like the green spoon and cup example described above.
- Put the X in the size Y - An example might be to put the **car** in the **little box**. The child would need to understand big and little already.
- Put the size X in the Y - e.g. put the **big cow** in the **field**. The child would need to know the vocabulary already.
- Action the colour X - This is a tricky one as there needs to be a few possible actions. For example if you said **eat the red apple**, as you were having snack, eat would not technically be a key-word as this is just what we would do automatically. However, eating and chopping apples, then it would be.
- Action the size X - Again this is a tricky one. If you said ride the big bike or read the little book, the verb is the automatic action associated with that object. However, if you said push the big bike then the verb would be a key word.
- Action to the colour/size X - This might work well if you are moving in different ways. So you could jump to the red bike, hop to the little slide, etc. The child would need to know the verb vocabulary, Ideally you would also need a bike of a different colour and a big as well as a little slide.

- Action the size/colour X to Y - Here you could say ride the red bike to the sandpit or read the little book to teddy and it doesn't matter that we have used the automatic verb.

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 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 size, position or colour concepts or the just with certain objects. If this is the case, you will need to use different vocabulary to build this skill but also support the child to learn that vocabulary outside of this task. Inconsistency might also be because they are 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 - big car, little car, big bus, little bus, garage, tree (picture or one from small world), and something to represent a house.

Positioning - I put the garage, tree 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 **big bus** to the **house**.
- Drive the **little car** to the **garage**.

Adaption - If you change the objects to a red bus, a yellow bus, a red car and a yellow car, you could do exactly the same with colour concepts instead of size.

### Activity Example 2

Objects - red plate, red pan, blue plate, blue pan (or colours you have and of your choice), apple, bread, banana (or other food of your choice from the home corner.)

Positioning - I put the food slightly away from the plates and pans 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 **blue plate**.
- Put the **apple** in the **red pan**.

### Activity Example 3

Objects - a blanket, an box, an bowl. These three things are going to act as locations. I then need 3 objects that can be put in these locations. I could choose any 3 objects as long as the children know the vocabulary. For this example, let's go for three animals - a horse, a lion and a pig. I have deliberately chosen 3 animals that are not very visually similar. For example, I have not chosen a goat and a sheep to use side-by-side.

Positioning - I lay the blanket out, turn the box upside down and put it next to the blanket and then turn the bowl upside down and put it next to the box. I put the animals (or whatever) closer to us. 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 **lion** under the **bowl**.
- Put the **pig** on the **box**.