

Developmental Area:	Receptive Language
Skill Strand:	Questions & Instructions
Skill Phase:	At First
Skill Step:	I understand negatives used as whole words in simple sentences without visual support

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.

Interactions

The interaction strategy for this skill step involves targeted use of language. This involves you saying things that you probably say already but adding these language models much more frequently. This enables you to target a child's next step more systematically and to significantly up the frequency and level of repetition. Repetition is crucial when it comes to language development.

With younger children or with an older child who has gaps with receptive language, we use lots of non-verbal communication to support their understanding. This is good practice. However, when targeting this skill step it is important to begin to not automatically shake your head alongside your use of negative grammar. This will encourage the child to move away from relying on your non-verbal support.

Of course, if you have said something without non-verbal support and it is obvious that the child has not understood, immediately say the same thing again but this time, add the shaking of your head. You will need to keep creating those opportunities to withdraw the non-verbal support to ensure progression.

When adding language for this skill step you might want to consider adding more of the following types of language models when interacting with the child:

- With nouns that the child already knows, say things like, "This is not an **apple**. This is a **banana**." or "This is not a **car**. It is a **boat**."
- With verbs that the child already knows, say things like, "The baby is not **laughing**. The baby is **crying**" or "Jack is not **walking**. He is **hopping**."
- With concepts (descriptive words) that the child already knows, say things like, "This car is not **yellow**. It is **red**" or "That drum is not **quiet**. It is **noisy**."

The world is your oyster with this one. Stick with words the child already knows. When adding new vocabulary, you will just want to add it without the negative grammar so that you can focus on what the new word means. Although you will want to increase the amount you say things like this quite significantly. It is all about balance. Don't end up saying these things too often. Remember to leave a slight gap between your

short sentences in order to give the child time to process the language.

As you give instructions or as you are explaining things to this child, be aware of the language you are using. For example, remember to say “do not” or “is not” rather than automatically saying “don’t” or “isn’t.” This is particularly important when managing behaviour. Many children who appear to have behavioural issues have underlying gaps with receptive language. These need to be considered as you talk to the child but these skills also need to be targeted to reduce these issues by targeting the real reason why.

Targeted Use of the Learning Environment and Daily Routines

The opportunities to add language in order to build this skill are everywhere. You don’t need specific resources. The main thing you will need to consider in your different areas and daily routines is – What words does this child already know? With which words can I create opportunities to facilitate this skill step and with which words do I need to just focus on building vocabulary.

Make the most of those daily opportunities such as when you get things out and put things away. These routines create opportunities to say things like, “The horse does not go in there. It is an animal. The horse goes in this box.” Again, remember to use short sentences and to leave a small gap between them.

You can create additional opportunities as you look at pictures in books. This will also build visual discrimination and vocabulary skills as you name things, talk about what people are doing or not doing and as you talk about what things are like and not like.

Focussed Activities

Be aware of the existing opportunities you have within the focussed activities you have already. For example, consider the negative grammar that is used in stories. Do you need to simplify the grammar if the story is using it in the condensed (n’t) form?

As you talk about stories, use those opportunities. For example, “Goldilocks did not sleep in the Daddy’s bed. She slept in Baby Bear’s bed!”

If the child is ready for more focussed work and group activities generally, semantic sorting activities are probably the best focussed activities to build this skill step. If the child is developing this skill step at the right stage for their age, the child might not be quite ready for these. You will have to consider their Auditory Attention along with their Conversation & Group Skills. If however, they are ready for small-group focussed work as you are backtracking to this skill step to fill Receptive Language skill gaps, then these activities are really useful to consider.

Semantic sorting activities are also really good at building other vocabulary skills – building vocabulary and building semantic links (connections between two words based on meaning such as horse & animal or drum & noisy.) They also build Auditory Attention and group turn-taking skills. Therefore, they will be beneficial to the other children in other ways, even if the other children already have this skill step.

These activities are really easy to prepare for as you can just use resources from your learning environment. You just need to gather together some objects that share a semantic link and another set of objects that don’t share that link. These other objects don’t all need to go together in a different way. They can just be random objects. Things

you might want to consider are:

- **Topics** - animals, clothes, food, transport, etc. Gather some objects that are in one of these topics and other objects that are not.
- **Function** - things that share a common verb such as things you can eat, open, draw with, listen to, etc. Gather together some objects that share the same verb and some others that don't.
- **Location** - things that are found in the same place such as at the park, the beach, the farm, etc. Gather together a group of objects that are found in this location and some others that are not.
- **Attribute** - things that share a common concept such as things that are yellow, things that are shiny, things that shiny, etc. Choose a set of objects that share this attribute and another set of objects that do not.
- **Part** - things that share a common part such as things with wheels, things with legs, things with a lid, things with buttons, etc.

Once you have gathered your objects put them together into a feely bag or a box. Within the group, ask the children to help you to sort the objects into two piles. For example, one pile has things that are animals and the other pile has things that are NOT animals. Take it in turns to pick an object out of the bag/box, talk about what it is and then consider which pile it needs to go on.

Creating a ruse of helping by pretending that the objects have been mixed up and that you need help to sort them out can give the task more of a sense of purpose and can increase motivation.