

Reading Comprehension

**A resource package to support
the development of reading
comprehension.**



Menu

[Introduction](#)

[Assessment](#)

The five step process

- [Step 1 Establishing context](#)
- [Step 2 Vocabulary](#)
- [Step 3 Sequencing](#)
- [Step 4 Inferencing](#)
- [Step 5 Predicting](#)

Resources and References

- [Visual Support](#)

- [Support for Step 1](#)

This section includes ideas on
Attention and listening
Categorisation
Word retrieval
Semantic links

- [Support for Step 2](#)

This section includes ideas on
Vocabulary
Barrier games
Word definition

- [Support for Step 4](#)

This section includes ideas on
Auditory memory and processing
Narrative work
Questioning
Comprehension

Introduction

Colleagues are often concerned about pupils who can decode well but struggle to read with understanding, ease and pleasure. This advice is designed to offer a structured approach to help schools and families to support such pupils in improving their comprehension skills.

A five-step process is outlined, followed by detailed suggestions for activities to support the stages.

In each case, there will need to be professional judgement made regarding the level at which it is best to start the intervention, how long to stay at each level, and how much overlap to allow between stages e.g. work on vocabulary could well be ongoing throughout the intervention and beyond. Work can be done on a group or individual basis. Ideas for assessment are provided in the next section, as it is important to evaluate intervention work carried out. It is important to consolidate what the pupil can already do and fill gaps in their learning, so it will do no harm to start at Step 1 and work through systematically. It will quickly become obvious if more or less input is required at each stage. Any part of this package will be beneficial to pupils.

We would like to thank all those Oxfordshire County Council colleagues who have contributed to and supported the development of this guidance. For further support/ to add comments for future editions please contact:
rachael.falkner@oxfordshire.gov.uk
pat.hudson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

[Back to Menu](#)

Assessment

Initial concern about a pupil's reading comprehension often arises through teacher observation and assessment, or when the pupil has difficulty accessing the curriculum.

Any of the exercises from the following resources provides a useful insight into how well a pupil is functioning and provides an informal assessment of comprehension.

Language for Thinking Parsons and Branagan 2005

Listening and Understanding in Secondary Schools Davenport and Hall 2004

New Reading and Thinking Learning Materials Ltd

However, it is important to get a really clear profile of the pupil's difficulties in order to ensure that provision is well targeted, and to provide a baseline at the beginning of any intervention work. The following formal assessment tools can be used for this, and can be reused after 6 months to evaluate the impact of work carried out.

British Picture Vocabulary Scales (BPVS)

Renfrew Word Finding Test (RWFT) Winslow

NFER Nelson Reading or Group Reading Tests

Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA)

York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC)

Please note that the Renfrew Word Finding Test needs to be administered by a Speech Therapist or LACAT.

[Back to Menu](#)

Step 1 Prior knowledge/Establishing context

We want readers to be in the best possible position to understand the text before they even start to interact with it. It will help them succeed if they feel comfortable with the task and confident that they already have useful knowledge and experience of the topic in the text. They need to be able to start from a position of strength, with what they know, not feel as if they are struggling with something new and strange. It is better to start from somewhere familiar and safe before working on something fresh.

There is an underlying, ongoing need to boost all pupils' self esteem to give them the confidence to see themselves as successful learners.

We need to help readers to access long term memory so that they can apply the things they know and link them to the text in hand. Sometimes people do not realise that what they know is relevant in a different context.

We need to help readers to make connections between what they know and what they are being asked to work with now. However, they may need help to focus on the relevant issues that they need to think about, so that they are not distracted by less important or irrelevant details.

To summarise

- build confidence
- help the reader access long term memory
- help the reader make connections so s/he can use what they know and know when it is relevant
- help the reader pay attention

Relevant skills for development would include attention and concentration, auditory memory, sequencing, categorisation, word-retrieval, semantic links. Any ongoing work on any of these skills will help.

Try to provide real experience as far as possible, even for secondary pupils, such as real objects, objects of reference, role play, small world, video, DVD, story sacks, tapes, books, comics, photos, scrapbooks, sensory feedback, story board and narrative therapy strategies.

See Step 1 Resources section for suggestions for useful materials, strategies and approaches.

[Click here for Support for Step 1](#)
[Back to Menu](#)

Step 2 Vocabulary

Words are the essential building blocks for comprehension. Teaching vocabulary is the most important part of this programme. It is often overlooked in all the pressures there are in school. Learning vocabulary is not about decoding or spelling or writing words but knowing what they mean and what use they are. We do not always explicitly teach vocabulary but we may need to for some pupils, at any age. Ways to do this are described in the Step 2 Resources section.

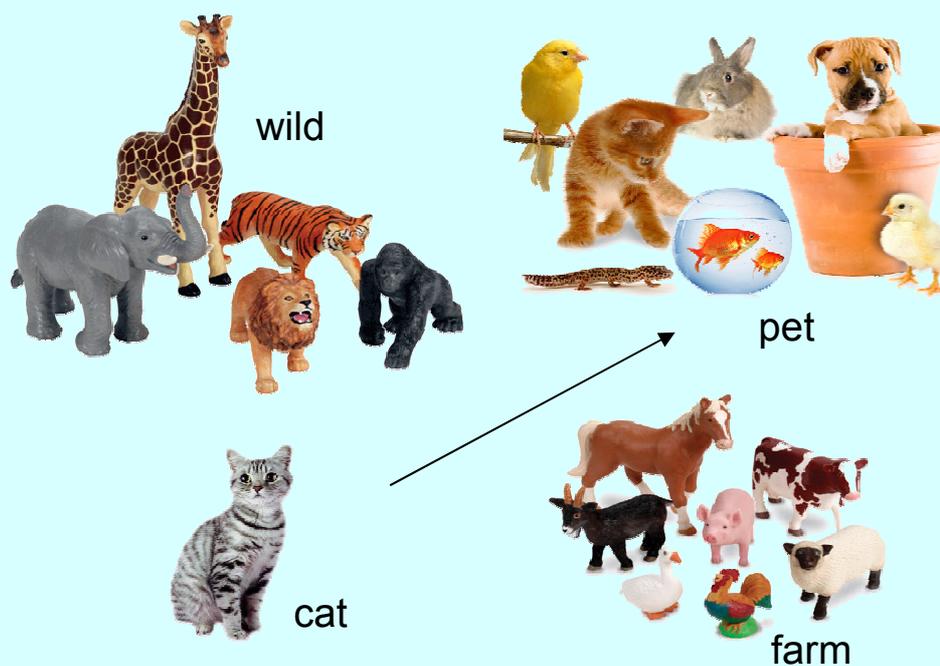
The reader needs

- to recognise the words
- understand them when s/he hears them and
- be able to use them spontaneously and appropriately

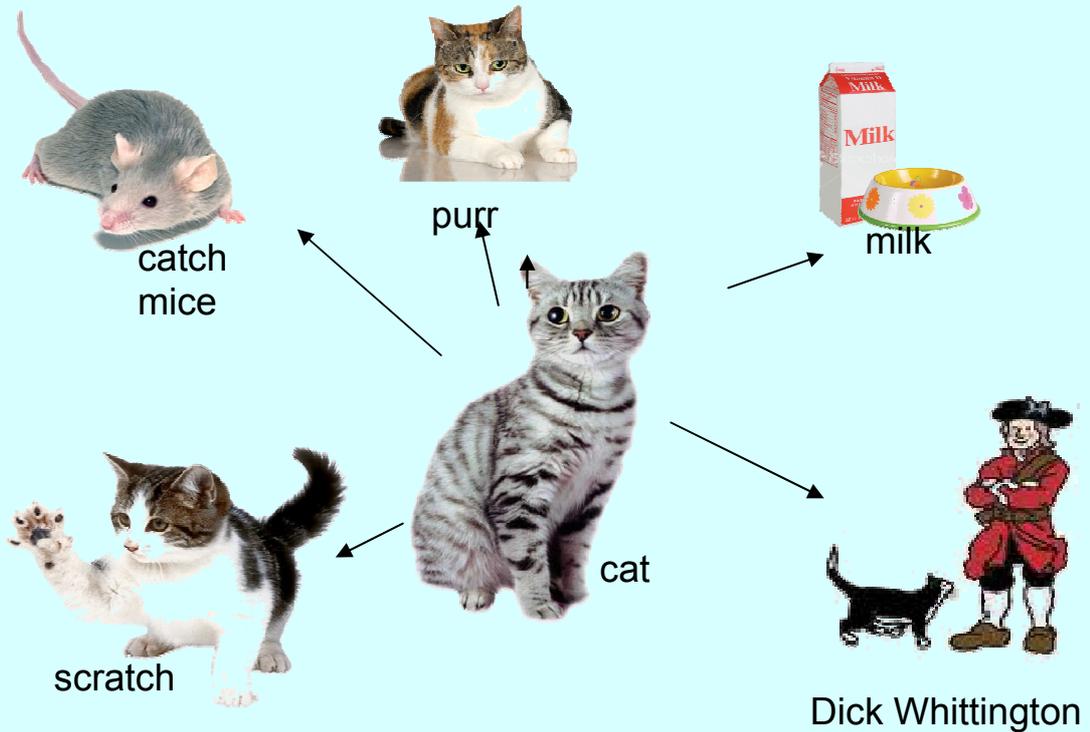
The reader will know the sounds within and the structure of the word from being able to decode the word for reading e.g. c-a-t /c-at but to know the word s/he needs to know what the word means and what use it is alone and in context.

There are several distinct steps for the reader.

- *What does the word represent? What picture does that word conjure up in your mind? The work described in the previous section will help build that understanding e.g. what does the word cat mean?*
- *What “semantic family” does it belong to? What connections does it have? How does it fit in with other words? e.g. cat sits within hierarchy - animals – pet as opposed to wild or farm.*



Also, cat is associated with milk, purr, scratch, catch mice, and the “Dick Whittington” story .



Classification is a very useful skill to work on continuously in as many different ways as possible.

It would help to think, ‘When would the word be used and in what context? Is it used anywhere in talking and writing or is it only used in a scientific magazine or in text speak or mainly in comics? Is it more likely to be said in a formal lecture or in everyday chat?’

It will be especially important that the reader can pinpoint the key words in a text as that will lead to making helpful connections, staying focused and being able to operate at the right level of information. Some words will be much more important than others in terms of carrying information
e.g. Please, **give me the big blue bear not the little red one.**

Put your science books in the tray on the window-sill before you put your chairs up and then you can go out to lunch.

To identify a word, the reader needs, not only to recognise the word but to be able to

- define it accurately e.g. *a fish = it goes under water – (but so does a submarine, so that is not accurate enough).*
- understand it in context especially if the meaning will change e.g. *more dinner* is not the same as *more/less* in a maths lesson, a *light bulb* is different to a *light colour* or *light/heavy*.

When the reader has really worked through all these steps and “learnt” the word, s/he will give evidence of success by using the word spontaneously. Celebrate!

Once the reader has the basic vocabulary required in place, s/he can work on vocabulary enrichment – see attached advice in Support for Step 2.

To summarise:

- teach what the word represents
- what links it has with other words – semantic links
- what context is it used in?
- which are the key, “information-carrying” words in a sentence/paragraph?
- define a word accurately
- understand multiple meanings
- extend vocabulary

[Click here for Support for Step 2](#)

[Back to Menu](#)

Step 3 Sequencing

This is simply putting things in the right order, either to tell a story e.g. stages of a flower growing, a trip to the shop, getting dressed; to copy or continue a set pattern or to do a task e.g. instructions for cooking or making something.

Any pictures can be used e.g. comic strips, postcards, photographs, pictures from old books and magazines as well as bought resources such as LDA cards.

You can also make patterns for the child to copy with bricks, threading beads or junk materials, threading different coloured drinking straws, Lego, plasticine, paper collage, paint, colouring stripes.

Objects can be graded by size e.g. Russian dolls or 2D objects, length, weight.

It can be part of the learning in maths, science and art projects and also wall displays.

There are jigsaws which show progression e.g. a butterfly emerging.

Some pupils benefit from a home-made book or card of digital photographs to support them with self-organisation skills e.g. changing clothes for PE, packing their bag, the routine of the day/week.

[Back to Menu](#)

Step 4 Inferencing

Now, the reader has to move from a literal understanding and use of words, and sentences alone and start to cope with non-literal use of language e.g. double meanings, humour, proverbs, idioms.

S/he needs to practise being able to “read between the lines” or draw inferences from what they have read.

The change from factual to non-factual is huge.

It needs

- self-confidence and courage to take a risk,
- enough experience to know what the possible non-literal meanings of any given phrase might be e.g. *raining cats and dogs*, *pull your socks up*
- experience to know that different sayings can mean different things in different parts of the country and/ or to different age groups
- memory and processing ability enough to hold all the words in your head and juggle them about so you can see all the options
- empathy and imagination
- the ability to predict.

One way to help readers is to build up skills at straightforward recall, “retell a short text”, so that they develop the ability to hold on to a sequence of events or information and gain appreciation of a sequence and of how things are connected to each other. **Narrative therapy** (see Step 4 Resources section) is a really useful approach here.

The next step is to question what is being said, probe below the surface, dig a bit deeper e.g. “*How does that boy feel?*” “*Why?*” “*What makes you think that?*” A pre-requisite is the ability to question, which might need to be taught as a skill. It is very hard for some pupils to question. If it is taking all their energy to make sense of what they see and hear anyway, they will have no capacity to question further.

If the pupil is developing his awareness of the non-literal side of language at the same time as strengthening his grasp on a narrative, s/he ought to be able to be guided into questioning the surface of what s/he reads and/or seeing alternative interpretations. There are different types of questions which can be asked e.g. open/closed ...

“*Did you go swimming on Saturday?*” is a closed question whereas

“*What did you do on Saturday?*” is an open question.

Pragmatics, the social use of language is involved here too. There are value judgements to be made regarding the type of language which is appropriate in different contexts.

To summarise

- work on auditory memory and processing skills

- work on prediction
- work on retell a text
- use narrative therapy strategy
- practise questioning
- use comprehension exercises
- develop empathy

The process, as a whole is cumulative in that we still need to work on vocabulary teaching at this stage where the non-literal words are becoming more prominent and hidden meanings are emerging.

[Click here for Support for Step 4](#)

[Back to Menu](#)

Step 5 Predicting – filling in the gaps

After and alongside inferencing, the reader needs to develop his/her ability to predict, to fill in the gaps. There are two main ways forward.

- Cloze procedure passages in which the reader either chooses from given options to complete a sentence / phrase/ short paragraph or generates his/her own choice of words can help provide a missing link. This uses all the skills from previous steps – experience, vocabulary knowledge, sequencing, questioning, comparing options, making judgements, coping with non-literal meanings. This adds the challenge to predict – what will come next?
Practice materials would be best “home-made” to link with the reader’s interests.
- It is helpful to look at any “referencing” in a text i.e. is it always clear what words like pronouns refer back to? A sentence in a text will often contain a reference back to a previous idea and assume that the reader is making the connection. Highlighting the connections between words can help a reader learn how to trace how the ideas in a text are linked together.

[Back to Menu](#)

Visual Support

Providing visual support to help readers visualise as they read is crucial scaffolding at every stage. We can support the emerging understanding of written text by using the reader's visual strengths.

Some ideas for visual representation and recording include:

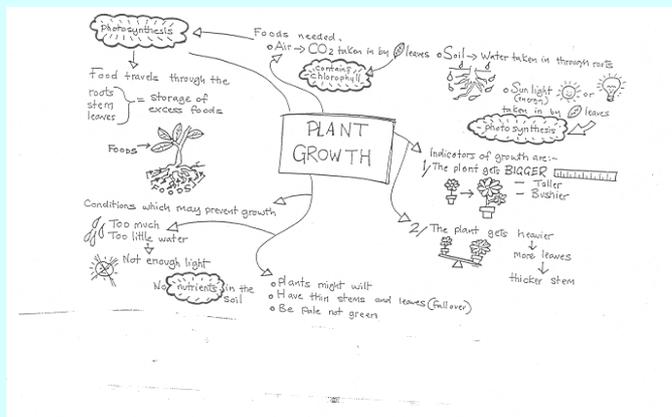
Visual timetables:



Story board/Summary grid:

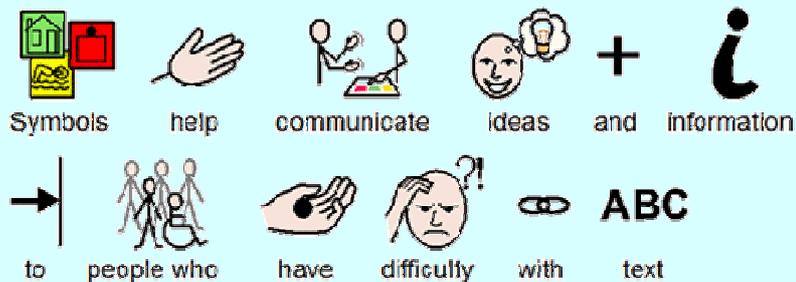


Mindmap/web:



Icons/photos/drawings:
ICT
Pictowords
Colour code
Highlight key words
Dialogue – speech bubbles

Widget symbols:



[Back to Menu](#)

Resources and References

Support for Step 1 – Prior Knowledge/Establishing Context

Attention and concentration
Categorisation
Word retrieval
Semantic links – references and examples

Support for Step 2 – Teaching Vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary
Barrier games
Word definition

Support for Step 4 – Inferencing

Auditory memory and processing
Narrative therapy
Questioning
Comprehension exercises

SUPPORT FOR STEP 1

Attention and Concentration

Categorisation

Word retrieval

Semantic links – references and examples

Attention and Concentration

How attention develops

Childrens' ability to attend and concentrate can vary enormously. The sequence in which attention control develops is as follows:

Fleeting – easily distracted, flitting from one thing to another

Rigid – can only concentrate on a task of their own choosing, cannot cope with interruption

Single-channelled – cannot cope with doing more than one task at a time, not even doing one thing and listening to another

Make sure to give instructions only when they are really concentrating just on listening. Do not speak while they are still doing something else.

Focusing – still only one thing at a time but can shift their concentration between task and instruction

Two-channelled – can do a task and listen to an instruction at once, although concentration might be short. It is only now that children can really work in a group

Integrated – two-channelled, well established and can apply across different situation and with different people

Ways to help develop attention and concentration in a classroom

- Place the child somewhere where it is easier to listen (at the front of the class/next to a good role model/away from doors and noisy distractions).
- Be realistic about how long the child can listen for e.g. will the session last longer than 5 minutes?
- Ask an adult to refocus the child in whole class sessions.
- Be really clear about what good listening is (“Look at me. Sit still, and really think about what I am saying.”).
- Praise the child and other children who are showing good listening behaviours.
- Use eye contact or signs to engage the child, and keep him/her focused on you.
- “Signpost” key points in the lesson by changing pace, and saying why the children need to listen.

- Signpost when you are going to give an instruction. Call the child's name, and make sure the child is looking at you.
- If you notice the child "tuning out", pull him/her back in by using his/her name, being dramatic, showing a picture, or any other ploy to attract attention.
- For younger children, get alongside their play/activity and comment on what they are doing .

Activities to support attention and listening

Ideas which support attention, listening, auditory processing (following instructions). Some ideas are:

- **Sounds roundabout** – ask child to listen for and remember all the sounds he can hear either inside or outside the room over a short period of time (30 seconds would be appropriate). S/he should be encouraged to identify and locate these sounds.
- **Sound lotto games** – available commercially, these are fantastic at developing children's listening. You can use simple ones, and move on to more complicated later. Keep going back to them.
- **Books on tape** - give the child the role of turning the page when cued by the tape.
- **Pass** a whisper/word/sound/message around the circle.
- **Go round the circle** with children alternating between saying "fish" and "chips" or any other combination they find funny! This is one of the best listening games with younger children.
- The children roll a ball to each other after they say a child's name.

Resources to support attention and listening

This is a selection of resources which can be bought.

It is often worth getting a catalogue/visiting the website to view the wider range available from these sources.

Language through Listening – a pack of ideas to develop pre-linguistic skills
Black Sheep Press 01535 631346 www.blacksheep-epress.com

Listening skills – Maths KS2

The Question Publishing Company Ltd, 0121 2120919 www.education-quest.com

Listening skills –KS1 – Levels 1 and 2 ISBN 1 898149348

Listening skills – KS2

The Question Publishing Company Ltd, 0121 212 0919 www.education-quest.com

Teaching Children to listen - a practical approach to developing children's listening skills, Liz Spooner and Jacqui Woodcock, Continuum Publishers

ISBN 9781441174765 2010

www.continuumbooks.com

Developing Baseline Communication Skills, Delemain

Talktime – a 6 week group programme available free from your LACAT

Categorisation

This skill can be practised with many different materials and at many different times – sorting objects by colour, size, shape, texture, use etc

Pictures can be categorised in scrap books or bags of objects.

It can come into many everyday activities which are going to happen anyway at school and at home e.g. tidying up, sorting the washing.

Word Retrieval or Word Finding

We are talking here about that feeling that the word required is “on the tip of the tongue” but elusive. This happens to nearly everyone at some time in their lives but sometimes it is so pervasive that it is a real obstacle to learning.

Ideas for activities are discussed in more detail below in the section dealing with vocabulary teaching (page 19).

Some children have a limited vocabulary for different reasons e.g. deprivation, learning difficulties, but if they are exposed to more words they can learn them naturally.

Other children have had good language experience but because of weak short-term working, auditory memory and processing, they have a real difficulty learning new words, storing words away in their brain and therefore getting the right words back out to use when they need to. It is perfectly normal to have word-finding difficulties to some extent at some times e.g. when you are tired, but if it is severe and persistent enough it can interfere with everyday life.

Word finding difficulty is mentioned here as relevant to establishing context and building on prior experience as pupils need to be able to access their stored vocabulary to draw on that past experience.

To work on word finding turn to Step 2 Support Vocabulary

Semantic links

Semantics refers to what words mean, so semantic links means word associations, i.e. the “family” or category that a word belongs to e.g. bed has semantic links with sleep, sheets, pillow, pyjamas, dreams, furniture but not with fish, ruler, sleigh.

Words link with each other by meaning and by sounds, by alliteration and by rhyme e.g. bed links with other b words and with other one-syllable words. These sorts of links are very important in vocabulary teaching/word retrieval work.

There is a commercial semantic links package – ref Semantic Links, Sadie Bigland and Jane Speake, Stass Publications, 0661 822316

[Back to Menu](#)

[Back to Step 2](#)

SUPPORT FOR STEP 2

Teaching vocabulary /word finding

It would be very helpful if the first few minutes of every/any lesson were spent teaching a new word, following the above system and if the key words were displayed in the classroom.

Follow this structure for direct teaching on an individual/paired/small group/whole class basis.

Pupils need to learn vocabulary before they can use it. They “file” it in their brains by either the sound structure of the word e.g. how many syllables, what sounds it starts/finishes with, what it rhymes with (the phonological route) or by the meaning of the word e.g. what grammatical group it belongs to e.g. name of a wild animal or what it looks like (semantic route). Neither route is any better than the other. Different ways work better for different people. These ideas will support explicit teaching of vocabulary.

Before you start work directly with the pupil plan like this:

- 1) Select a realistic quantity of words to work on at any one time so that the child will not “switch off” e.g. choose a core vocabulary for a curriculum topic.
- 2) Explain to the child why s/he is learning the vocabulary. Try to link with a class topic or with home.
- 3) Start with familiar concepts/vocabulary so that the child has a known starting place.
- 4) Relate to real life – real objects – real places as much as possible.
- 5) Plan classroom based activities to give opportunities to generalise and consolidate.
- 6) Use multi-sensory reinforcement e.g. visual support (gestures, signs, colour, pictures), tactile, motor movement. Tap into every possible learning style and memory.

In each teaching session follow these steps:

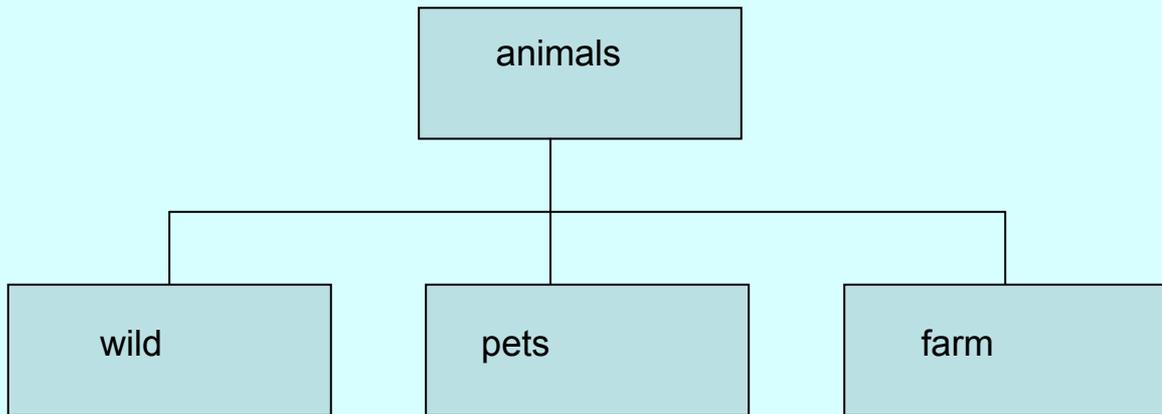
Take each word and do all these things:

- 1) Describe the word in these ways.
 - by meaning e.g. this is what you brush your hair with, opposite of hard
 - by attribute e.g. size, shape, colour
 - by association e.g. *You keep it with a comb. You use it in the morning when you get ready to go out. These things felt like this.*

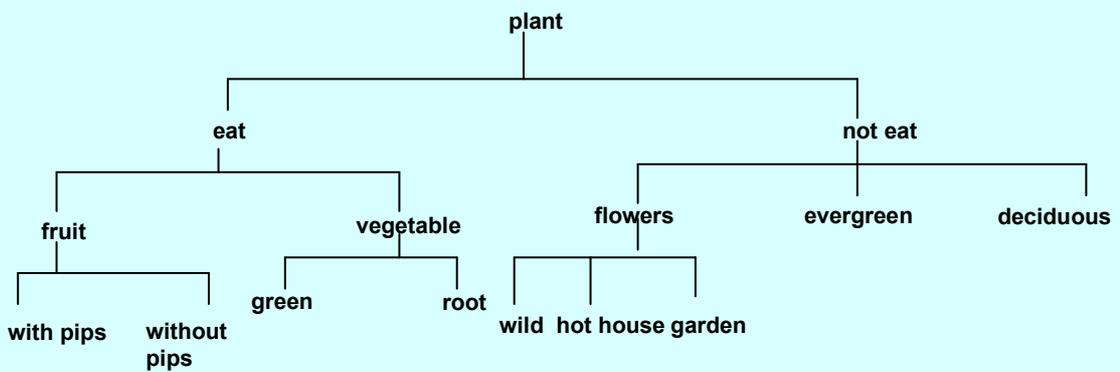
2) Teach the word by the sound structure e.g. the initial/final/medial sound in the word, rhyming etc b-r-u-sh.

3) Teach in categories e.g. animals, furniture, maths concepts, electricity.

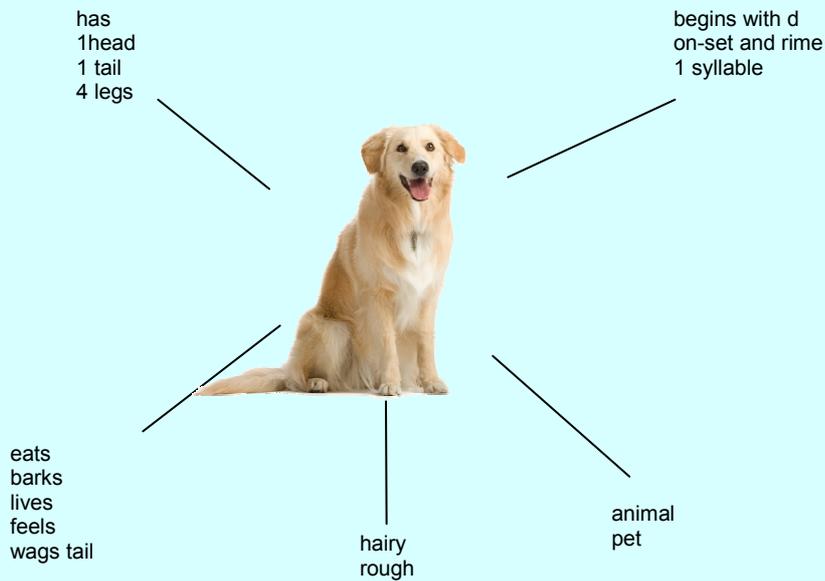
4) Within each category teach in a hierarchy e.g.



5) Teach via word trees which show this hierarchy



6) Teach via word webs e.g. dog.



7) Teach via semantic links i.e. things which go together e.g. to learn bed – sleep, duvet, blanket, pillow, dream.

8) Teach via word wheels e.g.

Put the new word at the centre of the wheel. Ask the child to suggest associated words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, verbs) and tell you why they go with the key word.

or

Provide all the associated words and the child has to guess the key word for the centre.

or

Provide the key word and a selection of correctly associated words and some non-associated words for the child to select.

9) Teach categorisation via tables/ Venn diagrams to show how words can belong to more than one category at any one time as this is often a problem for children to accept e.g. light.

General strategies to use in everyday life as well as the above set system.

- Reinforce the meaning of the word, not just the name e.g. “It’s a plant. It is in the garden and it grows.”
- Check understanding by asking open-ended questions e.g. “Where does that book have to go?”
- Teach new vocabulary in meaningful learning situations, using real objects and accessing visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles.
- Do not assume that the vocabulary will be generalised from one context to the next by the pupil - provide visual clues to assist the pupils to do this.
- Give the pupil experience of the target word in as many different contexts and with as many different people as possible.
- Teach words in sentences rather than in isolation e.g. “Egyptians lived on the banks of the” Where possible, cue in with a picture.
- Where possible, provide pre-teaching. Use topic books for younger pupils so that information can be “scaffolded”. Discuss word meanings using pictures.
- Do not insist on the correct word, rather accept a description or a similar word, but use the correct word in your reply, e.g. “It is where we keep the skipping ropes.” “Yes that’s right. It’s in the PE shed.”
- Cue in with a phrase made up of shorter words, “The books in a case - it’s a (bookcase)”
- Some pupils may find it helpful to be cued in with the initial sound or syllable. This is, however, a distraction to some.
- Give time to recall the appropriate word, move on and ask the pupil to let you know when s/he has remembered.
- Use visual support to show how words are linked e.g. Mind Maps.
- Word Definition; Ask questions related to the meaning of the word e.g. “What do you do with it?” “What does it look like?” Record on the Mind Map. Play card games matching words and their definitions.
- Play barrier games - put a screen between two pupils and ask them to give and receive instructions. Each pupil has a blank sheet and set of colouring pencils. Each pupil takes it in turn to give an instruction e.g. “Draw a red fish.” The other pupil then completes the instruction.
- Select pupils for different activities by description e.g. “If you only have sisters, go to the printing table.”
- Read a story and ask the pupils to put up their hand when they hear a specific word e.g. a word to do with time (before, after).

Games and Activities

- “Listen and Guess”: A set of objects is put in front of the pupil. The adult describes one of the objects and the pupil guesses which object it is.
- “Fruit Salad” – The group sit in a circle and each one has to run round calling out another fruit before sitting down. At any time the pupil can call out Fruit and everyone jumps up and runs round.

- “Pass the Parcel”; put objects or pictures between the layers of paper. When the music stops the player has to say one thing about the object/ picture. If it is correct it is “won”. The winner is the one who has the most objects / pictures at the end.
- “I went to market and I bought.....” Supply pictures of items pupils may not think of to extend their vocabulary.
- “Snap and Pelmanism” – Match words and word definitions.
- “I- Spy” use a description rather than a letter name.
- Match pictures of vocabulary to the name.
- Describe objects. Pass an object around and ask them to describe.
- Mind- mapping to provide visual semantic links between words. Arrange topics displays as a mind map.
- Use topic cue cards (pictures illustrating key vocabulary) to provide visual reinforcement.
- Provide vocabulary picture boards for individuals to reinforce vocabulary.
- Use dictionaries organised by meaning rather than initial sound.
- Play word association games.

Table and

Cup and

- Provide flow diagrams to support sequencing.
- Sort and classify types of television programmes.
- To learn vocabulary needed to talk about presentational styles, discuss the features in a television broadcast that help pupils to learn new material most effectively.
- Match “selling slogans” to different types of shops and products.
- Make a story resume book with a short entry for each book saying what the story is about and whether or not it was enjoyed.
- Work on understanding the concepts of arguments by providing a range of “for” and “against” recording forms.

Strategies to help a child with word-finding difficulties

Teaching vocabulary directly and indirectly as above will be a huge help but ensure that you **allow enough time for pupils to think and reply**. Do not jump in too soon because the child will then have to use language processing skills to work on what you have just said and that will use up energy and delay efforts to retrieve the word needed.

Give clues to help the child to think of the word e.g.:

- *What does it look like?*
- *What do you do with it?*
- *What is it made of?*
- *Where would you find it?*
- *What does it feel like?*
- *What shape is it?*
- *Who uses it?*

- *What category is it in e.g. clothes, toys, food etc?*
- *What does it rhyme with?*
- *Does it make a sound?*
- *How many syllables does it have?*

Provide a forced alternative e.g. *is it this or that – a car or a bus?*

Provide an associated word.

Provide a definition.

Provide a description.

Provide visual prompts using an object/symbol/sign/picture.

Provide a phonic clue e.g. *It begins with this sound. It's got three syllables*

Suggest a category e.g. *Is it something you eat/ something you did at the weekend?*

Accept a “roundabout” explanation.

Accept a drawing.

Activities to help overcome the problem

Teach new words systematically with all possible clues (see above direct vocabulary teaching).

Teach how to sort words into categories – make scrapbooks, sort sets of objects or pictures...

Practise naming classes e.g. *ball = toy* and *fruit and vegetables = food*.

Work on opposites and similarities.

Work on synonyms e.g. *run, chase, jog*.

Ask the child to name as many things as possible in one minute – at random initially and then in categories e.g. *give me five things to eat/wear*.

Names spatial relationships e.g. *garage = car, truck*, and temporal relationships.

Link verbs with objects e.g. *fish = swim, kites = fly*.

Ask child to complete phrases e.g. *knife and*

Work on auditory memory so that words are filed away and stored better.

Barrier games

See above in vocabulary teaching plus *Black Sheep* resources.

Word definition

Model by describing an object as above.

Use elimination type games such as *Guess Who* to practise giving precise information e.g. something which goes under the sea could be a fish or a submarine. Mind maps would help clarify overlaps visually.

[Back to Menu](#)

[Back to Step 3](#)

SUPPORT FOR STEP 4 Inferencing

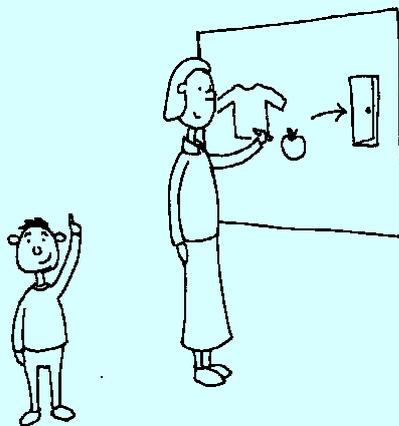
Auditory memory and processing

This is another really important area to work on, which will help other areas e.g. vocabulary, attention, listening.

Support strategies

- Always think “How can I make this visual?”

This is a powerful way to help the child to learn. You could use photos, icons, drawings, maps or demonstration.



- Get the child’s full attention (use name, is s/he looking at you?) before you tell him/her what to do, so that s/he has the best chance of taking in what you are saying.
- Pace how you talk. Bits of information, in short chunks with gaps for the child to really take it in.

small steps. Can you say it in small bits, or use pictures or writing that the child can check back to while working?

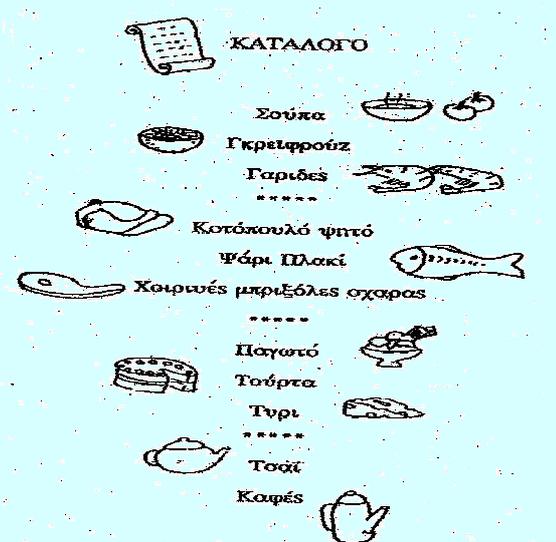
- Get the child to repeat back what s/he has to do before starting a task. Can s/he remember what to do first, next, last?

- Give the child key words to listen out for.

- Pre-teach vocabulary so that the child is not struggling to understand as well as to remember!

- Check that the child understands the words you are using.

- Give time for the child to talk and answer questions. S/he will need more time to make sense of what is being asked. A blank look may not mean s/he doesn’t know the answer; it may be possible to get to if given time.



- Cut down on language you really do not need to use, such as, “*I’d like you to...*” This feels odd at first, but is a great way to take the load off the child’s auditory memory – make sure your every word counts!

Activities for small groups

- Shopping *games*: ‘*I went shopping and I bought....*’ ‘*I went to the zoo and I saw.....*’ ‘*Into my suitcase I put.....*’
- Copying rhythms which are tapped out
- Re-tell simple stories.
- Listen to a short story and then recall all the names of people, all the different animals etc.
- Give the child a series of verbal commands – start with two and then increase.
- Clap back simple patterns.
- *Restaurant game* – one child to be the waiter and remember orders.
- *Simon Says* – very useful for expanding skills into remembering and following directions.
- ‘*What am I?*’ games – give children clues to guess what you are describing e.g. ‘It is an animal? it is big. It is grey. It has a trunk.’
- *Listen and Do* games –using toys, colouring to instruction etc.
- *Telephone Numbers* – use a toy telephone. The teacher is the telephone operator. A child asks her for the telephone number of his friend. The teacher supplies the number. Give longer series to those with better memories. If the child repeats the number correctly, he is put through to his friend.
- *Message games* – Chinese whispers. Deliver a simple message to a prepared adult.
- *Absurdities* – ask the child to listen out for things that are silly or absurd in a sentence e.g. ‘The sun is blue.’ ‘The dog moored when it was cross.’
- Ask one child to deliver a message but increase the time gap before it can be delivered.
- Read out a list of items. Repeat with one missing – see if child can identify which one you have missed out.
- Use published worksheets to give children practice in listening to instructions and carrying them out – see below for resources.

Ways to increase the complexity of memory activities

- Increase the number of items to choose between
- Increase the number of items to remember
- Increase the similarity of items to be remembered
- Ask child to remember in a certain order
- Introduce a time delay
- Introduce a distraction to make it harder
- Time limit the activity

Strategies that you can teach the child to use

- Teach the child to use strategies such as saying 'I don't understand' or 'Please can you say that again' – ensure all adults are aware that this is a strategy that you are encouraging.
- Help the child to use a recording system, e.g. using pictures/icons as the teacher is talking.
- Encourage the child to use rehearsal i.e. silent repetition of what has been heard.
- Encourage the child to make pictures in his/her head whilst listening – this comes more easily to some children than others – some may be able to draw as they listen.
- Encourage the child to pay attention in situations that are primarily auditory e.g. *Try and remember at least two things thattalked about in assembly today.*
- Read or listen – make a mind map or a concept map. Put what you need to remember in a diagram.
- Keep practising the recall of any information you need to remember. That is called verbal rehearsal.

Strategies for older children

- Teach the student to ask for clarification of what s/he has been asked to do *'so you mean I have to'* *'could you say that last bit again'*
- Teach the technique of verbally rehearsing instructions or information (i.e. saying it aloud or in the student's head).
- Teach the child how to divide information into manageable chunks to make it easier to remember e.g. we often remember phone numbers in chunks 765 389.
- Teach mind-mapping (with icons if this is helpful) as a visual way to take notes.
- Record key information using symbols or icons. Start off by practising using them in a structured situation; get the student to illustrate single words, sentences and then short passages. Use a small notebook which is carried by the pupil at all times.
- Teach the idea of linking things together i.e. making connections between things. If you had to remember that *'hulawoola'* is the Japanese word for *'igloo'* you might think of hula hoops and then imagine someone in an igloo eating them.
- Visualisation can be a useful way of supporting memory i.e. converting spoken words into pictures in the mind. Pupils can be taught to create pictures in response to a single word, a sentence, a passage and then a short story. They may like to think of this as seeing the events in their head or like replaying a video. One child remembered the word 'source' (of a river) by picturing a tomato sauce bottle as the source of the river.

Visualising is a technique that can be taught and your LACAT can provide notes and suggestions for materials on this.

- Mnemonics – let the student make up his/her own to help to learn sequences such as the names of the planets.
- If the difficulties are with a sequence of events or instructions try to remember how many parts of the instruction there were or how many events and then use fingers to count them off.
- Teach the pupil to ask for time in order to think and to make use of the above strategies.

Resources

- *Mastering auditory sequencing*, Jean Gilliam DeGaetano (Great Ideas for Teaching Inc), Winslow Press
- *Listening to and Processing Auditory Directions (Dinosaurs)*, Jean Gilliam DeGaetano, Winslow Press

Narrative work

There is increasing awareness of how important it is for students to be able to organise their thinking and express themselves clearly. Further details regarding narrative therapy work could be requested from your LACAT and/or materials obtained from the *Black Sheep* website.

Follow this structure:

- 1) Let the pupil practise retelling a short text. Start with just 6-8 sentences and extend gradually.
- 2) Let him/her work at retelling an event from their real experience e.g. a science experiment, news.
- 3) Support work in inventing a narrative from pictures which they have sequenced.
- 4) Ensure that they have secure concepts of *who, where, when, what happened, the end to a story*.

To teach these concepts you could do some work categorising e.g.

- for “who” - book or soap opera characters, film stars, people in work situations
- for “where” - locations,

Work on expanding dialogue and descriptive language.

This will all help the reader to understand the text they are reading.

A narrative should contain:

- Setting
- Initiating event – the issue, the “what happened”
- Response
- Plan
- Attempt
- Consequences
- Reactions/outcomes

Questioning

Practise who, where, when, why, what happened and use open rather than closed questions.

Comprehension exercises

Language for Thinking, Parsons and Branagan 2005

Listening and Understanding in Secondary Schools, Davenport and Hall 2004

New Reading and Thinking, Learning Materials Ltd

[Back to Menu](#)

[Back to Step 5](#)