

C7: Introducing Words

Lesson Objective: Using paper squares as visual aids, children will count the number of words in short, spoken sentences and compare the lengths of sentence pairs.

Materials

For this activity you will need two stacks of colored paper squares (for example, one stack of red squares and one stack of blue squares). A good size is 2 inches by 2 inches.

- red squares = who it's about words
- blue squares = what's happening words

It is also helpful to have a prepared list of simple two-word and three-word sentences. The words should all be one-syllable words. Here are a few examples:

- Jane jumps.
- Beth runs.
- Tom laughs.
- Sam plays.
- Jane jumps high.
- Sam plays ball.
- Ann drinks milk.
- Bob eats peas.
- Jim rides bikes.
- Liz sits down.
- Joe talks fast.
- Kate reads books.

Activity

Video: How to play Introducing Words

Lay out one red square (who it's about) and one blue square (what's happening) to represent a two-word sentence with one-syllable words: for example, "Sam plays." Explain to your child that this sentence has two parts, a who it's about word and a what's happening word.

Adult: Here is a sentence. Listen: "Sam plays." You say the sentence.

Child: Sam plays.

C7: Introducing Words (continued)

Put down a red square as you say Sam and a blue square as you say plays. Speak very clearly, pausing between words. Point to each square as you say its word.

Adult: “Sam [put down card] plays [put down card].”

“Sam [point to card] plays [point to card].”

This sentence has two parts.

Sam is the first part, and plays is the second part.

Each part is called a word. Can you count each word?

Child: One...two.

Adult: You counted two words. Sentences are made up of words.

What are sentences made up of?

Child: Words.

Adult: That’s right. We take words, and we put them together like this—

“Sam [point to card] plays [point to card]”—to make a sentence.

Can you say, “Sentences are made of words?” Child:

Sentences are made of words.

Now create a three-word sentence, using the same two words from the first sentence. Lay out the squares (one red and two blue squares) in a row below the squares for the first sentence. Line up the squares representing the first word of each sentence (as in the photo above) so it’s easy for the child to see which sentence is longer.

Adult: Here is another sentence. Listen: “Sam plays ball.”

Again: “Sam [point to card] plays [point to card] ball [point to card].” Say the sentence.

Child: Sam plays ball.

Adult: Can you count the words in this sentence?

C7: Introducing Words (continued)

Point to the words and count them.

Child: One...two...three. [touches each word as he counts]

Adult: Good. Tell me, is this sentence—

“Sam [point to card] plays [point to card] ball [point to card]”—

longer or shorter than this sentence—

“Sam [point to card] plays [point to card]”?

Child: I don't know.

Adult: How many words does this sentence have?

[Point to the squares for “Sam plays ball.” Count with the child if necessary.]

Child: One...two...three.

Adult: And how many words does this sentence have?

[Point to the squares for “Sam plays.”] Child: Two.

Adult: The sentence with more words is longer.

So, can you point to the longer sentence?

Child: [pointing to the squares for “Sam plays ball”] That one!

Adult: Good job finding the longer sentence!

For the next round, have the child compare sentences made of totally different words, such as “Sam plays” and “Ann drinks milk.” Remove the squares you laid out for “Sam plays ball,” and put down three new squares (one red and two blue) as you say the words “Ann drinks milk.”

Repeat this with at least five more sentences in a session. Mix it up so that sometimes the shorter sentence is first and sometimes the longer sentences is first. Review and practice this activity frequently in the upcoming days and weeks, until your child masters this new concept. It is a critical piece in building a child's understanding of the structure of language.

NOTE: Point out the spaces between the word cards. Explain that when you write words, you leave a little space to show where one word ends and the next one begins.

NOTE: DO NOT write any words on the paper squares! This exercise is about learning to hear the individual words in a sentence. We are still a long way from reading!

C7: Introducing Words (continued)

Small Groups (2-5 children)

Additional Materials:

- optional: small box tops, small trays, or placemats

Adaptation: Read the main activity, watch the video, and follow the instructions above, with the following changes:

Give each child several red and blue squares. Ask the children to make a stack of red squares and a stack of blue squares.

Practice as a group. Say a sentence from the 2-3 word sentence list above. Give the children these instructions: “Take a red square from your stack and put it down in front of you when you hear the who it’s about part of the sentence. Put a blue square in front of you for each word you hear that tells you what’s happening in the sentence.” Call on different children to repeat the sentence and place the squares representing the words in that sentence.

Using a box top or small tray for each child, have the children work as teams of two to “build” two spoken sentences and compare their lengths. Remind children to line up their rows of words for each sentence neatly, with just a little space between each piece of paper.