

SENTENCE-BUILDING SKILLS

Section 3 Module 8 'Lifelong Learning'

Introduction

What is it?

The Sentence-Building Skills section provides a check-list of some of the grammar needed to make intelligible sentences. It follows a compromise between normal development and the route frequently followed by AAC users, which often focuses on getting the message across and worrying about the 'little words' later.

Appendix 7 contains a basic starter vocabulary with various 'types' of words, for example, nouns such as man, cat; adjectives such as good, hot; prepositions, such as in, on, under, etc. The Sentence-Building Skills section provides a way of developing further.

Do we really need to teach grammar?

For some children "the process of learning language is a difficult one that requires concerted intervention to facilitate the process. This is especially true for children with physical disabilities and severe speech impairment who require AAC." - Janice Light (1997).

Some people who use AAC are keen to produce 'normal' sentences, others are content to use the minimum number of words necessary to get their message across (understandable when they access by scanning techniques).

For the first group, it is sometimes advisable to point out how rarely the 'normal' speaker uses complete, grammatical sentences, and a short-cut answer can be enough to say what you mean. Shelina used to insist on spelling out every word to make a complete sentence. She needed to understand, for example, that it is enough to say "Monday" when asked when she went to the dentist, and there is no need to say "I went on Monday"; this may be correct, but tends to make people find they don't have time for striking up a conversation.



Shelina could spell Millennium more accurately than her teacher!

The second group may need to be told that it is not only for written work that the person using AAC will need knowledge of grammar, and you may need to point out or set up situations where good sentences are advisable. Sadie had just told me a two-word phrase “Pathfinder own”, when I noticed that some school visitors were making their way up the corridor. Fortunately the visitors were side-tracked into a classroom and Sadie rose to the occasion, expanding the phrase to “I will have a Pathfinder of my own” in time to tell the visitors.

Another situation where it really shows if you do not make intelligible sentences with reasonable grammar, is on the telephone. Here there are no additional clues to meaning and students usually find it advisable to work out some sentences with good structure before they telephone.

Switch users necessarily take much longer to construct a message, so they need to pre-store sentences when they know what will be needed, particularly when dealing with the general public. After a class discussion about college interviews, Sarah asked for several questions to be stored, ready for her forthcoming interview. Among the questions she wanted was: “Will I have a room of my own?” “Can I stay in and rest in the evenings if I am very tired?”

One snag in using AAC is that there is no intonation to convey meaning. For example someone who says “Oh yes.” when told they will get a pay rise if they work harder, may, by their intonation, be saying “I don’t believe you!” So an AAC user who wants to convey humour, sarcasm etc has to be particularly careful of their sentence structure as this is the only vehicle by which they can convey emotional tone.

The section ‘Sentence-Building Skills’ can stand alone as a check-list to ensure a student is aware of the various grammatical constructions. Alternatively, it can be used in conjunction with [Section 2, ‘Programmes for the Development of AAC Skills](#). In either case, the idea of learning grammar could strike dread in the heart of any student, and it needs to be made as lively and interesting as possible. (See [Module 4 Games](#)) It is essential to intersperse gossip with grammar and frivolous activities with serious sentence practice. Outings put the skills into practice with a wider audience and validate the whole exercise. Make it worth the effort by going to the shops or the leisure centre or to book seats at the cinema.



Sadie enjoyed the visit to the station to find out how to book a train

Sentence-Building Skills					
Key WT = Working Towards P = Achieved with Prompt Spon = Spontaneous use					
} Insert date under these headings					
	Activities	Examples	WT	P	Spon
1	Select words from the suggested basic vocabulary and personal additions.	See Appendix 7 and Personal Information profile (Appendix 6).			
2	Extend single word messages in response to a request for further information.	“Mum” What about Mum? “Mum car” (meaning Mum’s got a new car)			
3	Combine words spontaneously.	James tea			
4	Make negative phrases.	No coffee/ I don’t want tea/I not like			
5	Combine subject + action.	Dad go, I see			
6	Combine: Adjective + noun Noun + adjective	Big man, cool disco Dad angry, Boy good			
7	Combine action + noun.	Want music, have tea			
8	Combine more + noun..	More drink			
9	Use ‘and’ to join nouns.	Fish and chips Music and dancing			
10	Use plurals.	Cat - cats Shoe – shoes			
11	Use ‘a’.	A cat			
12	Use 4 possessive adjectives: My, your, his, her	My hat, your coat			
13	Use ‘s to show possession.	Dad’s shoe			
14	Use the present tense with correct endings.	I go, she goes, he goes			
15	Combine preposition + noun.	In bag, under table, behind box			
16	Combine question + noun.	Where dog? What book?			

	Activities	Examples	WT	P	Spon
17	Use subject + action + object .	I like discos I wear trousers			
18	Use 'the'.	The cat sat on the mat			
19	Use action words in the present.tense ending with 'ing'.	Riding, watching TV			
20	Combine Subject + position + place.	Music in the disco Dog on the chair			
21	Use 4 object pronouns: 'me, you, him, her'.	Look at me Give it to him			
22	Combine subject + negative + action or noun.	I can't sing/I not sing Mum no home			
23	Use 'this, that, here, there'.	This table Put it there			
24	Use possessive pronouns: 'mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs'.	This is mine, that is yours			
25	Use more object pronouns: 'it, us, them'.	Give it to us I don't like them			
26	Develop questions in sentences.	Who is that? Where is he?			
27	Develop the past tense.	I went You said			
28	Use time words in sentences.	Yesterday I went... Today it is sunny			
29	Use more possessive adjectives.	Its, our, their			
30	Use conjunctions to join two phrases together.	But, and, because, so			
31	Use changed word order to make questions.	You do like cheese Do you like cheese?			
32	Link two or more ideas and sentences.	Picture description, story telling			
33	Use the future tense.	I am going to go I will tell you			
34	Use comparatives.	My class is better This one is bigger			

	Activities	Examples	WT	P	Spon
35	Use superlatives.	I am the greatest Arsenal is the best			
36	Use adverbs in sentences.	I ran quickly, he went slowly			
37	Develop the conditional tense.	I would if I could			
38	Use reflexive pronouns.	myself, yourself, yourselves, himself, herself, itself, themselves, ourselves			
39	Use negative inversions to make questions.	Don't you like.....? Doesn't he want.....? Describe a holiday			
40	Describe an event in detail.	Tell a story			