 Language Syntax

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Comprehension & Expression

As students transition from elementary school into middle and high school, demands in language increase. Language begins to shift to more abstract concepts. Sentence structures become more complex expecting students to understand the relationship between parts of the sentence or how certain words indicate relationships, such as using “although” rather than “if”. Both academic and social language includes inferences, nuances and complexities that a student may not have developed the skills to understand. This can impact their academic comprehension, social engagement, and ability to express more complex and detailed thoughts in their speech and writing.

Developing understanding of how to structure and arrange words, phrases and clauses in sentences improves reading comprehension. (Poulsend & Gravgaard, 2016). Poor syntactic skills are a precursor to poor academic reading comprehension and require intervention to improve skills. (Campanelli, Van Dyke, & Landi ASHA Convention 2023). Developing understanding and expression of complex language structures should follow a step by step process using a developmental model and expanding on basic and foundational structures.

Putting It All Together has developed a step by step process to build these skills. You can also build your own lessons from our framework.

1. Teach the part of speech or sentence structure with easy to understand language. Try to take out abstractions and labels when you can. Show with examples.
2. Have the student look for that syntactic element in passages and text examples. Being able to spot those examples will increase their awareness of them, how they are being used.
3. Have the student fill in the blank with that syntactic element. If you can start with error free learning this builds confidence. Then increase the choices so the student has to figure out which one works. This helps the student begin to discern the differences and uses of words.
4. Find a story and using the context of the story, create sentence scrambles, where the student organizes all of the words in a sentence. This helps the student see how that syntactic element relates to and is organized in the whole sentence.
5. Expansion activities include: Summarizing and creating their own sentences using that syntactic element. Use word banks and sentence frames to increase success.

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