Vocabulary Intervention for Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

Are you a speech-language pathologist (SLP) working on vocabulary intervention with school-age children with specific language impairment (SLI)? Here are some tips for success when choosing the words you teach to your clients.

**TARGET WORD SELECTION**

*We cannot teach children all the words they need to know, so how do we prioritize the words we teach?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phonotactic Probability</th>
<th>Object Familiarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize words with low phonotactic probability, or those words with neighboring sounds that infrequently occur next to each other.</td>
<td>Prioritize words that are paired with unfamiliar objects, or those objects for which a child does not already have a name.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EVIDENCE**

Semantic cues resulted in improved comprehension, while phonological cues resulted in increased production.¹

Children produced more words that were low phonotactic probability and were paired with unfamiliar objects than any other combination of these two factors.²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low/Unfamiliar</th>
<th>Low/Familiar</th>
<th>High/Unfamiliar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean correct responses (based on production)

Children showed significant improvements in written expression and listening comprehension when their teachers collaborated with SLPs in order to teach vocabulary through explicit instruction.³

**TEACHING STRATEGIES**

*How can we provide high-quality services to children with SLI through vocabulary intervention?*

**Cues**

Encourage higher production and comprehension of words by presenting...
- Semantic cues
- Phonological cues

**Explicit Instruction**

Provide clear and direct teaching through the use of...
- Child-friendly definitions
- Multiple exemplar teaching
- Opportunities for practice

**Next Steps**

If you are using vocabulary intervention with one of your school-age clients, consider obtaining vocabulary words from your client’s teachers as possible target words. In addition, collaborate with your client’s families, teachers, and other related professionals to create learning opportunities beyond therapy sessions.

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**Sources:**