



Increasing Utterance Length

Utterance Length is a term used to describe the number of words a child puts together to form a phrase or sentence. Your child may currently be using single words, combining two words, or combining 3 or more words to make a request (i.e., “more”), to protest (i.e., “no juice!”), to comment (i.e., “the tower big!”), or greet (i.e., “hi daddy”). The goal now is to help your child learn to make longer, more complex utterances.

Strategies:

- **Follow your child’s lead:** Your child is more likely to learn a more advanced way of talking if you include their immediate interest when you respond.
- **Expand by Imitating + Adding:** Match your language level to your child’s language level by imitating what they say, and adding one or two new words to make their message more complete, or expand to make it more complex:
 - New words may include:
 - **object names** (e.g., book, car, table)
 - **action words** (e.g., eat, want, wash)
 - **colours** (e.g., red, yellow, blue)
 - **descriptive words** (e.g., big, little, hot, cold)
 - **location words** (e.g., in, on, under, out, off)
 - **quantity words** (e.g., one, two, more, all)
 - **possession words** (e.g. my, your)
 - **feeling words** (e.g. happy)
 - One of your new words might be a grammar structure such as an **article** (a, the), a **pronoun** (I, he, she), or a **helping verb** (is, are). These can help to expand your child’s initial communication.
 - Other grammar structures include **word endings** such as those used to indicate more than one (i.e., blocks) or the past tense (i.e., walked).
- **Model grammatically complete sentences or phrases** (e.g., If your child says “block,” expand by saying “the big red block”).
- **Highlight/Stress** the word or words that you want your child to notice. You can highlight a word by pausing just before you say it and by saying it longer or louder (e.g., if your child says “eat,” you could say “eat ...the **apple**”).
- **Wait 3-5 seconds** to give your child an opportunity to copy your model. It is not necessary to insist your child copy what you have said. Pausing gives your child a chance to respond.
- **Keep the interaction going** by using an exciting voice and an animated facial expression.

The “Imitate and Add” strategy can be used in almost every interaction that you have with your child throughout the day. Frequent use of this strategy will help your child increase the length of their own utterances.



Examples of Imitating and Adding:

If your child communicates in one-word utterances:

| Activity | If Your Child Says... | You can Respond by Saying... |
|----------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Story Time | “Dog” (as they point to a picture) | “That’s a big dog” |
| Meal Time/Snack Time | “More!” (as they hand you an empty cup) | “I want more.” |
| Outside Play | “Ball” (as they ask you to kick the ball) | “ Kick the ball” |
| Dressing Time | “Shoe” (as you put on their shoe) | “One shoe on ” |

If your child communicates with a two-word utterances:

| Activity | If Your Child Says... | You can Respond by Saying... |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Story Time | “See dog” | “I see a big dog” |
| Meal Time/Snack Time | “More juice!” | “I want more juice” |
| Outside Play | “Kick ball” | “Kick the red ball!” |
| Dressing Time | “Shoe on” | “ Put one shoe on” |

If your child communicates with a three or four-word utterances:

| Activity | If Your Child Says... | You can Respond by Saying... |
|----------------------|------------------------|--|
| Story Time | “The girl hug dog” | “The girl is hugging the dog” |
| Meal Time/Snack Time | “I drink juice” | “You are drinking the juice” |
| Outside Play | “Boy kicking the ball” | “ The boy is kicking the ball” |
| Dressing Time | “Where my socks” | “Where are your blue socks?” |