

Developing Sentence Memory in Children on the Spectrum

By Dr. Marion Blank

The following is a series of steps to foster sentence processing in children with ASD.

1. **Selecting the Material:**

Start this work only after the child has completed Book 1 in the ASD Reading.

Use the sentences from the words the child is learning. Each word appears in a format where the word is embedded in sentences.

If it is a non-content word (words like *these, some, is, are, were, etc.*) the relevant sentences will be the first format that the child sees. If it is a content word (words like *run, kid, play, jump, etc.*) the relevant sentences will be the last format that the child sees.

Select three to four sentences that appear in the word being taught that session.

Write down the complete sentences exactly as the child is going through the session. Use a different page for each sentence.

2. Writing the Sentences: After the session, show one of the sentences to the child and have him/her read it (silently or aloud). (If there are any errors, correct the child and tell him/her the correct word.)

Then, cover the words the child has just read aloud, and ask the child to write them—using either paper and pencil or a word processor. Try and have the child work silently—and discourage any overt labeling of letters, sounding out, etc.

The child has to write the entire sentence from memory. Here s/he is allowed to make one error in the writing or punctuation. If there is a second error, you immediately stop him/her and repeat all of the earlier writing done that day (following step 2 above).

If the child “forgets” the words, take away the paper and provide a fresh sheet or if using a word processor, delete the words thus far done on the computer and start the process again. It is essential that the child retain all the words in the sentence.

The child is responsible for punctuation and capitalization. You tell him/her that at the start, but do not point it out when s/he gets to a part of the sentence that demands either punctuation or capitalization.

If the child makes an error at any point, you stop the child, take away the paper, but do not discuss the error. Then show the words again and provide fresh paper. Then remove the words and have him/her start the writing from the first word--even if it is the last word that contained the error. Remember, you remove the paper at the first sign of error.

Do each of the remaining sentences in the same manner as above.

3. Writing Without a Model After a Delay: After a delay of 30 minutes or more, you have the child again write **one** of the sentences. Say, "We are doing one of the sentences again, but this time, you cannot see the words." You select one of the sentences the child did that day (Do not allow the child to make the selection). (This can also be done on the following day.)

You dictate **the entire sentence** without showing him/her any of the words. Here s/he is allowed to make one error in the writing or punctuation. If there is a second error, you immediately stop him/her and repeat all of the earlier writing done that day (following step 2 above). If the child "forgets" the words, take away the paper or delete the words thus far done on the computer and start the process again. This time, you can show the written sentence, but then remove it before asking the child to write it. It is essential that the child retain all the words in the sentence.

4. Frequency: The technique should be applied a minimum of four to five times a week.

Generally significant improvement is attained within 8 weeks.