

Syntax: Somewhere Between Words and Text

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An analogy...

phonemic awareness : decoding

as

syntax : vocabulary meaning

text comprehension

comprehensible writing

*"If you make the water deeper,
you'll be a better swimmer."*

nce

If the text is more complex,
you'll be a better reader.

The Sentence Comes First

“If a reader cannot derive meaning from individual sentences that make up a text, that is going to be a major obstacle in text-level comprehension.”

Scott (2009)

“Make infinite use of finite means”

Humbolt

“Syntax permutes and combines words to represent a potential infinity of relations among objects, events, and concepts.”

Studdert-Kennedy p. 162

Bridging the Word-to-Text Gap

Phonemic Awareness and Phonics	Syntax and Grammar	Reading Comprehension and Writing
Word Level	Sentence Level <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interpret word meaning• Determine punctuation use• Understand basic sentence structure—who did what to whom• Clarify ambiguity	Text Level

Interpret word meaning

Multiple meanings

season (n) a period of a year
 (v) add flavor to food

As a New Englander, fall is my favorite **season**.

The chef used garlic and basil to **season** the soup.

Interpret word meaning

Word order impacts meaning

red **brick**

brick red

What happened by reversing the order of the words?

The function of the word **brick** changed from a *noun* naming a building material to an *adjective* describing the color red.

Interpret word meaning

Try it:

💧 apple **crisp**

💧 **crisp** apple

What happened by reversing the order of the words?

Determine punctuation use

Tree's branches *versus* oak trees

Grammatical knowledge of the function of **trees**—possessive in the one, plural in the other—determines the correct use of punctuation and inflectional endings.

Punctuation clarifies meaning

I like cooking my family and my pets.

Where do the commas belong?

I like cooking, my family, and my pets.

Understand basic sentence structure

Dog bites man.

Man bites dog.

A startled **dog bites** the **man**, who broke into the house in the still of the night.

At the county fair, the hungry **man bites** the juicy **dog** tucked inside the toasted bun.

Clarify ambiguity

We could see the light *from the window*.

From the window we could see the light.

Do we know where “we” are?

Clarify ambiguity

As we approached the house,

we could see the light from the window.

From the window we could see the light

of the approaching train.

Clarify ambiguity...

The lady bumped the man with the umbrella.

What makes this sentence unclear?

How can the ambiguity be clarified?

Clarify ambiguity...

The lady bumped the man *carrying* the umbrella.

The word *carrying* clarifies *which man*.

The lady bumped the man with *her* umbrella.

The word *her* clarifies *whose umbrella (the lady's)*
and *what bumped the man*.

The Big Kahuna

Inadequate ability to process the syntax of language results in the inability to understand what is heard, as well as what is read.

- Beyond word knowledge, it is the single most powerful deterrent to listening and reading comprehension
- It can adversely affect intelligence or ability measures.

Greene, J.F. (2011)

Instruction Required

At the level of **syntax**,

direct teaching

focuses on

the varieties of ways words can be arranged

to create and modify **meaning**

Effective Instructional Practices

- Concrete, visual
- Fluency
- Meta-cognitive awareness
- Application (transfer)
- Cumulative content

Concrete and Visual

a

box

day

hurry

in

When?

in

a

day

Where?

in

a

box

How?

in

a

hurry

Fluency

in a box

during the revolution

in a hurry

with a bang

in a yellow wood

in a day

WHEN?

WHERE?

HOW?

Fluency

WHEN?

WHERE?

HOW?

in a day

in a box

in a hurry

during the revolution

in a yellow wood

with a bang

Applying to text

At first, strong thunderstorms form over open seas. This happens in warm Atlantic water during the late summer.

WHEN?	WHERE?	HOW?
At first	over open seas	
during the late summer	in warm Atlantic water	

Applying to text

Sailors have listened to whale songs for thousands of year. The songs fascinate us. Roger Payne is a scientist who studies whale songs....

“Mark how long people have been listening to whale songs.”

from *LANGUAGE! Live*, Unit 7, Teacher Edition p. 68

Meta-cognitive Awareness

At cooler temperatures, water vapor from evaporation condenses in the atmosphere.

At cooler temperatures, / water vapor /
from evaporation / condenses / in the atmosphere.

Application (transfer)

Mac sat on a mat.

Who did it?

Mac

What did Mac do?

sat

Where did Mac sit?

on a mat

Application (transfer)

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our prosperity do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America.

Who did it?

We

What did we do?

do ordain and establish

What did we do it to?

this constitution

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our prosperity **do ordain and establish this constitution** for the United States of America.


Cumulative Content

Picasso said children were artists. Picasso said they could see the world with new eyes.

Example from *LANGUAGE!* 4E Unit 14, IT page 74

Cumulative Content

Picasso said **children** were artists. Picasso said **they** could see the world with new eyes.



Example from *LANGUAGE!* 4E Unit 14, IT page 74

Cumulative Content

Even at a very young age, Pablo Picasso knew he was an artist. He had amazing drawing talent. His father, an art teacher, encouraged young Pablo. Some people today look at Picasso's art and think it's simple. But simplicity was Picasso's genius. He looked at the world in new ways. Once, Picasso noted that all children are artists because they can see the world with new eyes. The problem, he said, lies in how one manages to remain an artist after growing up. Can adults continue to view the world in a unique way? Picasso himself grew up to be one of the greatest artists of all time.

Example from *LANGUAGE!* 4E Unit 14, ST page 33

Cumulative Content

Even at a very young age, **Pablo Picasso** knew **he** was **an artist**. **He** had amazing drawing talent. **His** father, an art teacher, encouraged **young Pablo**. Some people today look at **Picasso's** art and think it's simple. But simplicity was **Picasso's** genius. **He** looked at the world in new ways. Once, **Picasso** noted that all children are artists because they can see the world with new eyes. The problem, **he** said, lies in how one manages to remain an artist after growing up. Can adults continue to view the world in a unique way? **Picasso himself** grew up to be **one of the greatest artists** of all time.

Example from *LANGUAGE!* 4E Unit 14, ST page 33

Any questions?



Thank you!

For follow up, please contact me at

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