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Naming Attributes

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The world is full of wonderful new words to learn. But for a student with a receptive and/or expressive language disorder, learning new vocabulary can be challenging. In speech-language therapy sessions, strategies are utilized to help students gain and retain new vocabulary. One of those strategies is naming attributes. Attributes describe different qualities of an object.

Here are some examples of naming attributes while describing a hat:



- **Function** – “What does it do?” “It keeps your head warm.”
- **Location** – “Where do you find it?” “On your head.”
- **Category** – “What group does it belong to?” “It is a type of clothing.”
- **Composition** – “What is it made of?” “It is made of fabric.”
- **Parts** – “What parts does it have?” “It has a brim, a strap to adjust the size, and a button on top.”
- **Size** – “What size is it?” “It is smaller than a person but larger than a glove.”
- **Shape** – “What shape is it?” “It is rounded on top with a flat brim.”
- **Color** – “What color is it?” “It is red and black.”

The Benefits of Attributes

Attributes assist language acquisition by creating a map in the brain around the new vocabulary word. By knowing the characteristics of an object, the student gains a broader understanding of what that object is. This “map” can also assist in word retrieval, which is the ability to think of the name of an object when needed, by creating more pathways to where the name of the object is stored in the brain. Naming the attributes of objects also gives opportunities to expand vocabulary to other nouns, verbs, and adjectives. For example, when learning the word “Jupiter,” one can describe it as a giant (size), gaseous (composition), orbiting (function) planet (category).



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When is Naming Attributes Useful?



- **When the student has the word "on the tip of the tongue":** – Students often say, "I know the word, I just can't think of it." Naming attributes can help a student (and adults) remember the name of the word. It can also help the listeners around the student guess the word he/she is trying to say.



- **When learning new vocabulary:** – If a student is learning new words and objects, naming attributes can help him/her remember the name of the object in the future.



- **When modeling language for young children:** – While taking a walk through the park, the mall, or the backyard, having a conversation with young children is crucial for language development. Using descriptive terms will help the child gain a better understanding of the world around them.



- **When encouraging students to expand their writing:** – "The goat" would sound a lot more interesting if it were, "the large grey mountain goat that loved to hop onto high places."

These strategies benefit children with and without language disorders, as well as adults. Ask your speech-language pathologist about more strategies to learn new vocabulary.



Resources:

- McGregor, K., Newman R., Reilly R., & Capone N. (2002). Semantic Representation and Naming in Young Children. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, Vol 45, 332-346. [https://jslhr.pubs.asha.org/epdf.aspx?doi=10.1044/1092-4388\(2002/026\)](https://jslhr.pubs.asha.org/epdf.aspx?doi=10.1044/1092-4388(2002/026))
- Capone N. (2012). Can Semantic Enrichment Lead to Naming in a Word Extension Task? *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, Vol 21, 279-292. <https://ajslp.pubs.asha.org/article.aspx?articleid=1769717>
- McGregor, K., Sheng, L., & Ball T. (2007). Complexities of Expressive Word Learning Over Time. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, Vol 38, 353-364. [https://jslhr.pubs.asha.org/epdf.aspx?doi=10.1044/1092-4388\(2002/026\)](https://jslhr.pubs.asha.org/epdf.aspx?doi=10.1044/1092-4388(2002/026))

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