

## **Structure Words**

Look at images and ask children to describe them using structure words.

These are words/this practice will help them develop visual imagery skills.

When we read, we use visual imagery skills to develop pictures and even “movies” in our minds of what we are reading. People who do this well, are able to cement concrete details and ideas as they read and **have greater comprehension**. Developing visual imagery through the use of structure words will also **improve writing context and structure**.

1. What
2. Size
3. Color
4. Number
5. Shape
6. Where
7. Movement
8. Mood
9. Background
10. Perspective
11. When
12. Sound

Always start with/introduce What, Size, Color, Number **first!** For younger children, I sometimes leave perspective and sound out. The order after What, Size, Color, Number doesn't matter as much but the beginning order does. You know those people who can't ever give you the main idea or describe things in concise ways? It often translates into scattered thinking, reading comprehension, and writing. By developing a framework for concept imagery that focuses on the “what” first, we develop that skillset directly.

## **Using Structure Words**

### **Picture to Picture**

Have a child hold a picture, which you cannot see. Ask them to describe the picture to you using the structure words. Create a picture in your mind of using the information they are giving you. When you are done asking the questions, summarize the details and image you have in your mind without looking at the picture and have the child correct or add any details from your mental picture. Once this is established, look at the picture with the child and point out all the ways in which THEIR details gave you a MENTAL picture that was similar or different than the actual picture. The objective of the exercise is to create visual descriptions as closely real as possible for the other person, utilizing the structure words. Now, put the picture away and have the child, using the structure words, describe the picture without looking at it from memory. When they are finished, compare it to the actual picture.

Do this with 1-2 pictures and stop unless the child is enjoying the exercise and wants to do more.

### **Word to Picture**

Show a child a picture and have them study it then cover the picture and using the structure words have child use words to describe and create a picture using words of what they saw. When they are done, compare the description they created verbally to the actual picture.

## Known Noun Imagery

Give your child a known house, example: a house. Prompt your child to create a picture with words of what that house looks like. Use the structure words and prompting to create a detailed image and then summarize what you see to child.

*Make games out of this. Have fun. Observe your correction. You are developing a skill with your child...this should be a positive experience. Take turns. These are auditory/verbal exercises. If it feels coerced and oppressive or dreadful in your body or theirs — redirect your efforts and come and see how you can make this a positive experience. Release the “authority/schooling” ideas of what could be and embrace collaboration and joy. When in doubt, model what you want your child to see. Over time, with modeling and practice, the skill will develop.*

*\*Imagery exercises adapted from “Visualizing and Verbalizing” by Nanci Bell. This program is my favorite program for this skill development and I believe it is extremely underutilized.*

It is important to note that in the past the use of audio books, radio programming, and oral traditions all prompted the development of visual imagery. Even classic children’s books had sporadic illustrations, often black and white.

As we have moved into a visual society, our minds are spoon-fed images. Television, instagram, youtube, children’s books, even



external visual stimulus.

Unless we add intentionality to our exposure mix, visual imagery is an underdeveloped skillset and reading comprehension as well as depth and cohesiveness of writing suffers. But, let’s think about what else suffers? Innovation and creativity, the ability to “read a room” in social situations, spatial reasoning, mental mapping, focus and attention, and more.

Developing visual imagery matters! In addition to structure words, insert podcasts, audio books, telling not just reading) stories, and you guessed it...creative, open ended PLAY to their



adults periodicals, are all image heavy.

Children learn nursery rhymes and traditional stories through animated videos and seldom HEAR stories from their parents and grandparents. Every book is heavily illustrated. Older children rely heavily on social media and

mix in continuum. Children with open ended toys develop visual imagery. Children who sing songs, instead of watching animated versions of them, develop visual imagery. Children who are “pretend” play are developing and utilizing visual imagery. When we say, “play is the work of the child,” it is a factual concrete science based facts. Moving away from play, and into prescriptive toys, animation, and even visually loaded literacy materials has negatively impacted reading comprehension and writing.

You now have a greater understanding. Be intentional with it and use your super powers.