

# UNDERSTANDING & USING LONGER AND MORE COMPLEX SENTENCES

ORAL LANGUAGE SUPPORTING EARLY LITERACY  
RESEARCH PROJECT



Hugh McCusker

MONASH University 

OLSEL Project Officer

OLSEL Research Project

Longer Sentences



**Australian Government**

---

**Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

## Background to the Project

Student's oral language ability has been shown to have a significant influence on the development of their reading, writing and spelling.

Oral language is a component of all teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom.

Strengthening students' oral language will lead to better literacy learning.

In the research project to date, four oral language abilities have been shown to enhance literacy development are as follows:

- Ability of identify sounds and sound patterns in words;
- Ability to use and comprehend longer and more complex sentences;
- Knowledge of words (vocabulary); and,
- Ability to link ideas to say and write a story.

As children develop, they learn to comprehend and use longer and more complex sentences.

Using longer sentences allows your children to put more ideas together as well as to more effectively let us know what they understand.

As their reading and writing develops, they read and write increasingly longer and more complex sentences.

We provide models of how to make longer sentences and we assist them by often expanding the sentence they have just said, e.g.

Child:       Daddy go work

Parent:      Daddy's gone to work in his car

Child:       That man is in the shop

Parent:      Yes he is. The man who was at school  
the school is in the shop.

We provide these types of expansions or longer sentences frequently every day.

Importantly,

- The expanded sentence we say is usually linked to the sentence said by the children.
- This assists them to develop longer sentences.

What is the difference between these sentences?

The boy was running fast. He was late for school

The boy was running fast because he was late for school.

The girl went outside. The school bell rang.

The girl went outside when the school bell rang.

The books were damaged. We bought some new ones.

The books were damaged so we bought some new ones.



What meaning is implied in these sentences?

The boy was in trouble because he was late for school

I can go outside when the bell goes

I thought it would be hot but it was cold

I will play the game after I have eaten my lunch

I cannot go out as I am feeling sick

What meaning is implied in these sentences?

If it stops raining I will go out to play

I read the library book instead of reading my magazine

I could not find the boy so I stopped looking for him

Don't go outside until you have finished your work

Before you play the game, you will have to pick sides

One group of words that we use to make longer sentences is “conjunctions”.

They have two roles:

- They join sentences.
- They indicate the presence of particular meaning-based concepts

<b>because</b>	<b>Cause &amp; Effect</b>	<b>I was feeling sick because I had a cold</b>
<b>if</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>If it starts raining, I will put my coat on</b>
<b>before</b>	<b>Time / Sequence</b>	<b>You have lunch before you go outside</b>
<b>after</b>	<b>Time / Sequence</b>	<b>You can go outside after you finish your tea</b>
<b>but</b>	<b>Comparison/ Contrast</b>	<b>I thought it would be hot but it was cold</b>

<b>or</b>	<b>Options</b>	<b>I can read my book or I could go outside</b>
<b>when</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Come up to the front of the classroom when you have finished</b>
<b>so</b>	<b>Cause / Effect</b>	<b>I was hungry so i got something to eat</b>
<b>until</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>You will have to stay until everyone is finished</b>
<b>instead of</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>	<b>I went to the library instead of going to the park</b>

Helping children learn to use a wide range of conjunctions will help them both comprehend and use longer and more complex sentences.

In the same way that we as parents assist with so much of our children's language development, we can also assist them to develop more use of these conjunctions by using them ourselves and encouraging our children to use them.

Pick one of the conjunctions, e.g. *because*. For a period of two weeks, take every opportunity to use sentences that contain this conjunction.

Start a sentence and get your child to finish it, e.g. *We will get a drink because.....*

Ask your child questions that will facilitate their use of the conjunction, e.g. *Why do you think we are going to the shops?*

When you come across a sentence in a book containing the conjunction you are focusing on, repeat the sentence stressing the conjunction, e.g. *the boy was cold **because** he forgot his coat.*