

Understanding Abstract Language at Blank Level 2

Language and how it is structured is complex. To try and make it simpler, **Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978)** created the Blanks levels of questioning. This is a framework which helps us to think about how some types of questions and sentences are more difficult to understand than others.

The Blanks levels split language into **concrete** and **abstract concepts**. Concrete language is usually easier to understand than abstract language.

Concrete language: This includes simple naming words (nouns), action words (verbs) and describing words (adjectives).

Abstract language: These are words that you can't see such as 'imagination', 'thinking', 'how' and 'why'.

At Blanks Level 2, children need to think about objects in more detail, how they go together in categories and what is happening around them. For example, the following questions could be asked when cooking;

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| Identifying object function | Which do we cut vegetables with? |
| Finishing a sentence | You roast the potatoes in the... |
| Things that go together | What goes with fork? |
| Sorting and categorising | What else is a vegetable? |
| Give an example (objects in sight) | Name another vegetable (objects in sight) |
| Linguistic concepts | Find a black plate Find a big spoon Find two cups |
| Describe a scene | What is happening? What is happening in the picture? |
| Identifying differences | What is different about the fork and spoon? |
| Showing a picture or giving information and asking: | "Mum went into the kitchen and put the milk in the fridge" |
| Who? | Who was in the kitchen? |
| What? | What did she put in the fridge? |
| Where? | Where was she? |

Cueing techniques

If your child does not understand you, there are different ways you can help. These techniques help to scaffold your child's understanding and should be gradually dropped as your child's understanding improves. Try the following suggestions:

- **Give time** – make sure you have given your child enough time to respond.
- **Delay** – make sure your child has waited until you have finished your request.
- **Focus attention** – make sure your child is looking at you and listening to your request.
- **Repeat** – repeat the request again.
- **Simplify** – break your request down into parts or make it simpler.
- **Use questions to clarify** – check your child understands by asking them questions.
- **Focus on the feature** – help your child focus on the feature she/he needs to look at to be able to understand your question. For example if you're asking how two items are alike, you can draw their attention to the relevant similarity such as colour or size.
- **Forced alternatives** – give your child two alternatives for example "What is he doing? Is he running or jumping?"
- **Sound/syllable cues** – give the first sound or syllable of the answer.
- **Gesture** – use gesture to help your child understand or to cue them in to the answer.
- **Rephrase** – repeat the question in a different way.
- **Sentence completion** – give the answer sentence for your child to complete. For example "What colour is it. It's....."
- **Demonstration** – show the answer without talking and then ask again. For example "What would happen if we put water in this broken cup?" Then demonstrate.
- **Experience the concept** – help the child experience the answer. For example "How does it feel? Touch it."
- **Relate known to unknown** – help the child to relate the request to previous experiences. For example "The spaghetti is hard. How will it feel after it is cooked? Remember when we cooked the potatoes? How did they feel?"