

# Vocabulary Intervention for Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

Are you a speech-language pathologist (SLP) working on vocabulary intervention with school-age children with specific language impairment (SLI)? Here are some tips for success when choosing the words you teach to your clients.

## TARGET WORD SELECTION

We cannot teach children all the words they need to know, so how do we prioritize the words we teach?

### Phonotactic Probability

Prioritize words with **low phonotactic probability**, or those words with neighboring sounds that infrequently occur next to each other.



### Object Familiarity

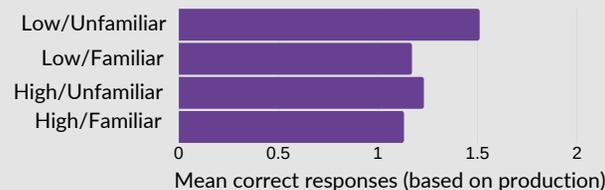
Prioritize words that are paired with **unfamiliar objects**, or those objects for which a child does not already have a name.



## EVIDENCE

**Semantic cues** resulted in improved comprehension, while **phonological cues** resulted in increased production.<sup>1</sup>

Children produced more words that were **low phonotactic probability** and were paired with **unfamiliar objects** than any other combination of these two factors.<sup>2</sup>



Children showed significant improvements in written expression and listening comprehension when their teachers **collaborated** with SLPs in order to teach vocabulary through **explicit instruction**.<sup>3</sup>

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

How can we provide high-quality services to children with SLI through vocabulary intervention?

### Cues

Encourage higher production and comprehension of words by presenting...

- Semantic cues
- Phonological cues



### Explicit Instruction

Provide clear and direct teaching through the use of...

- Child-friendly definitions
- Multiple exemplar teaching
- Opportunities for practice



### Next Steps

If you are using vocabulary intervention with one of your school-age clients, consider obtaining vocabulary words from your client's teachers as possible target words. In addition, collaborate with your client's families, teachers, and other related professionals to create learning opportunities beyond therapy sessions.

#### Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Gray, S. (2005). Word learning by preschoolers with specific language impairment: effect of phonological or semantic cues. *Journal of Speech, Language & Hearing Research, 48*(6).

<sup>2</sup>Gray Shelley, Brinkley Shara, & Svetina Dubravka. (2012). Word learning by preschoolers with SLI: Effect of phonotactic probability and object familiarity. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 55*(5), 1289–1300.

<sup>3</sup>Starling, J., Munro, N., Togher, L., & Arciuli, J. (2012). Training secondary school teachers in instructional language modification techniques to support adolescents with language impairment: A randomized controlled trial. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 43*(4), 474–495.

