

An Introduction to Information Carrying (Key) Words

Information Carrying Words

The concept of Information Carrying Words (ICWs) was devised by Knowles and Massidlover (1978) and underpins the Derbyshire Language Scheme and Language Steps (Amanda Armstrong, Stass Publications).

An ICW or key word is a word that carries meaning. Many words in a sentence are redundant. This is particularly true of the highly predictable world of a young child. For example, if everyone is going out to play and the teacher holds up a child's coat and says, "Put your coat on", the child does not need to understand any of the words because they can see what is needed from the context.

So, given this situation
 'Put your coat on' = 0 ICWs

Typical Development of Comprehension

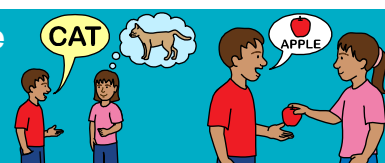
This table shows the typical development of understanding of key words. Normally developing children may experience difficulties with understanding and following the complex, rapid directions often given in an educational setting.

Number of ICWs understood	Age equivalent
2	2 years
3	3 years
4	4 years

A child's level of understanding is not always apparent from their expressive language. This may mean that a child is working on a different level for their understanding to the level they are working on for their expressive language, e.g. a child could be working on their understanding of three word phrases whilst working on their use of two key words in their own talking.

Examples of ICWs

On the next pages there are examples of instructions containing increasing numbers of ICWs. The ICWs, i.e. the words that the child has to understand to follow the instruction accurately, are underlined.



0 ICW

No choice.

- The child has something, an adult gestures to 'come here' or points to the item and says 'Give me that'
- Only dolly available on the table and adult says 'Give me dolly' or 'Show me dolly'

One ICW

This is where there is only one word in a phrase or short sentence which the child has to understand to follow an instruction.

- "Pass me the scissors" when there is a choice of scissors, pencils and paper
- "Where's the book?" when there is a choice of book, key and monkey
- "Wash dolly?" when there is a choice of washing dolly or teddy
- "Where's your nose?" when there is a choice of other body parts

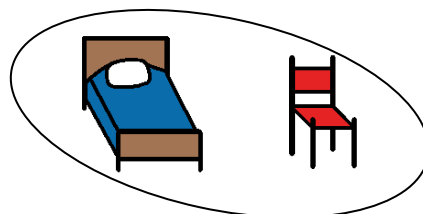
If there is a choice of dolly and a brush, then saying 'Brush dolly's hair' contains no key words because there are no alternative choices and 'brush' is the natural thing to do.

For further activities please refer to Language Steps (One Word Level) or the One Word Level Programme.

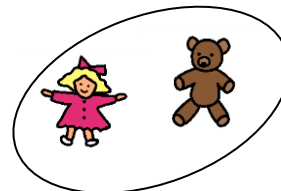
Two ICWs

This is where there are two words in a sentence that have to be understood for the child to follow the instruction accurately.

- 'Put teddy on the chair' when there is a choice of teddy *or* dolly and chair *or* table (see pictures below)



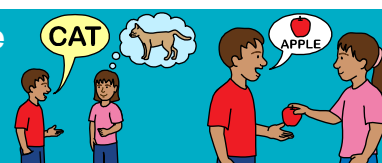
2nd key word



1st key word

- 'Wash teddy's ears' when there is a choice of teddy *or* dolly and a range of body parts (ear, feet, face, nose etc)

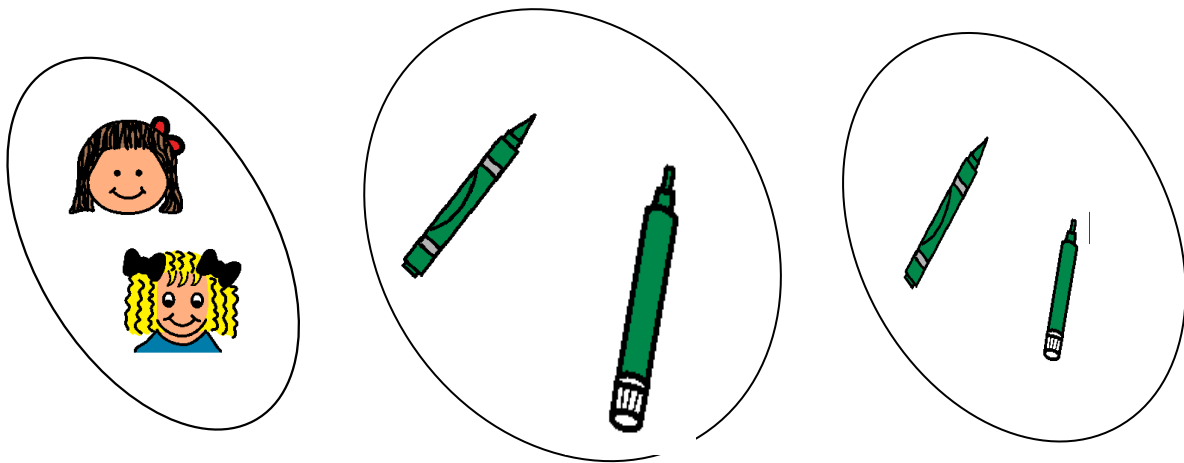
For further activities please refer to Language Steps (Two Word Level) or 'Developing Comprehension and Expression at a Two Word Level'



Three ICWs

At a three key word level you can start to introduce concepts such as 'under' and 'big/little'.

- 'Put big cat in the car' when there is a choice of a big cat, a small cat, a big dog and a small dog, a car and a boat
- 'Give Lucy the small crayon' with a choice of Lucy or Kate, a small and big crayon and a small and big felt tip



For further activities please refer to Language Steps (Three Word Level) or 'Developing Comprehension and Expression at a Three Word Level'

Four ICWs

At a four key word level you can introduce colours and more complex position words such as 'behind' and 'next to'.

- 'Give Alice the big red brick' with a choice of Alice or Matthew, and red/blue/yellow bricks and cars which are big and small
- 'Put Sponge Bob in the box and Barbie in the house', where there is a choice of Sponge Bob/Barbie/cow/Bagpuss and box/house/basket
- 'Put the car behind the big tree' with a choice of car/lorry, big/small tree, big/small house and different options for position (e.g. behind/next to/on).

For further activities please refer to Language Steps or 'Developing Comprehension and Expression at a Four Word Level'

