Expanding Noun Phrases, Part 2

1 On Your Marks!

Objective

To use expanded noun phrases to convey complicated information concisely in a manner appropriate to the context.

Key definition

A noun phrase is a noun and the words that describe it, which together act as a noun in a sentence. For example: ‘the girl’, ‘the tall girl’ and ‘the tall girl over there’.

2 Get Ready

Prior knowledge

Children should have a solid understanding of the following.

- nouns
- adjectives
- commas in a list

Recap previous grammar knowledge acquired and touch on areas of uncertainty highlighted in the Diagnostic Check, particularly nouns, adjectives and commas in a list.

Explain that this session will build on the last one by teaching how to use more complex noun phrases.

Terminology

Nouns are the subjects or objects of verbs. In the sentence, ‘The girl sat on the wall’, ‘sat’ is the verb, ‘girl’ is the subject and ‘wall’ is the object.

Phrases are groups of words that work together without verbs. In a phrase, there will be one word that all the other words modify.

In a noun phrase, the other words will be modifying a noun. In the sentence above, ‘girl’ is a noun; ‘the girl’ is a simple noun phrase. This can then be expanded with an adjective: ‘the tall girl’ is a simple expanded noun phrase. ‘the tall girl by the wall’ would be a more complex expanded noun phrase.
Expanding Noun Phrases, Part 2

Purpose and application

Expanded noun phrases allow us to communicate precise information in a quick, concise way. Adding adjectives before nouns is a basic skill in the building of description, but it requires practice to do well.

Redundant adjectives should be avoided. For example, in ‘the soggy, wet flannel’, ‘soggy’ and ‘wet’ say the same thing. In ‘the huge giant’, the adjective is adding no value to the already descriptive noun.

Adjectives should be chosen to convey precise meaning and, where they are not needed, simplicity may be best. ‘The big, black, powerful panther’ may not tell the reader more than ‘the panther’; ‘the small, cuddly panther’, however, would convey useful – and surprising – additional information!

3 Get Set

Resources

• The Expanding Noun Phrases diagnostic check PDF
• This Expanding Noun Phrases teaching sequence
• The Expanding Noun Phrases video
• The Expanding Noun Phrases game sequence (see below)
• The Expanding Noun Phrases assessment PDF
• Shared text (a current literacy or cross-curricular text)
• Mini white-boards and sentence strips
• Appropriate photographic images

Activities

1. Use a sequence of images of individual objects and / or people (a dog, a cat, a child, a bicycle, a car, a house, etc.) and in each case children should suggest a noun phrase, expanded by an adjective or two (e.g. ‘a small, aggressive dog’ or ‘her fat, contented cat’). Work quickly, making speed part of the game, and allow peers to judge whether the added information accurately reflects the picture.

Develop this process by describing multiple details of one picture, trying to create a specific effect (e.g. for a picture of a dog: his alert, pointy ears; the glistening nose; his bright, intelligent eyes; a long, bushy tail).

2. Find a page or scene from the current class book, in which mood or atmosphere is important. Have children identify noun phrases and the adjectives that have been added to them, note the tone of the description and discuss its impact on the overall piece.
Have the children suggest different adjectives for each noun phrase that would contribute to a radically different mood or atmosphere. For example: ‘the lonely boy stumbled into the dark room’ could become ‘the cheerful boy stumbled into the brightly-lit room’.

3. ‘Human sentences’: using mini white-boards or strips of card, build a sentence that contains both a subject noun and an object noun, e.g. ‘The man ran towards his car’. Ask children to identify the simple noun phrases (‘the man’ / ‘his car’).

Ask for expansion of those noun phrases with adjectives, inserted on further mini white-boards or paper strips. In each case, ensure children picture the scene created by the expansion of the noun phrase and assess the value of the adjectives used. For example: ‘The smart, professional man ran towards his sporty red car’ or ‘The ill, exhausted man ran towards his battered, dusty car.’

This process can be extended to stretch children’s vocabulary: where possible, challenge children to improve the nouns and so make some adjectives unnecessary (e.g. ‘the smart, professional man’ could become ‘the businessman’); useful adjectives might then be added (‘the ill, exhausted businessman’).

**Practising with the Bug**

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<th>Game</th>
<th>Skill</th>
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<td>Expanding Noun Phrases Game 4</td>
<td>Expand noun phrases with appropriate detail after the noun, based on context.</td>
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<td>Expanding Noun Phrases Game 5</td>
<td>Compose noun phrases with detail after the noun, in the context of a passage.</td>
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<td>Expanding Noun Phrases Game 6</td>
<td>Compose noun phrases with adjective(s) before the noun and detail after, within a passage.</td>
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<td>Expanding Noun Phrases Game 7</td>
<td>Compose complete sentences that include noun phrases expanded in a variety of ways.</td>
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<td>Independently compose passages featuring expanded noun phrases.</td>
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4. Go!

Noticing Noun Phrases

In individual reading, shared reading, and reading across the curriculum, children should notice where simple noun phrases have been expanded with adjectives, and where they haven’t. If a simple noun phrase is used (i.e. a noun phrase with no expansion), children should consider its effects: does it convey enough information? Would it be genuinely improved by the addition of an adjective?

Shared reading

During any shared text work, anywhere in the curriculum, have children signal when they notice noun phrases expanded by adjectives. As above, they should always assess the usefulness of the adjective: what extra information is supplied?

Shared writing

In shared writing, model redundant adjectives that do not add useful information (e.g. ‘the smart, professional businessman’) and have children contribute effective adjectives or choose to keep the noun phrase simple.

Independent reading and writing

The following writing genres lend themselves to the use of noun phrases.

- narrative writing
- personal recount
- biographical writing
- historical reports

In both narrative writing and personal recount, carefully expanded noun phrases can give a scene a distinct mood or atmosphere. Children should make sure that the details provided by the different expanded noun phrases work together to contribute to a specific feeling, whether positive or negative, happy or sad.

Have the children apply this same technique in biographical writing and historical reports as well as journalistic recounts. They should, however, be careful not to overdo descriptive effects in largely factual accounts.