# **What are Information Carrying Words?**

Many words in a sentence are redundant in common everyday situations. For a word to be classed as a ‘information carrying word’ (ICW) (sometimes called an ‘key word’) there must be an alternative choice for the child to select.

An information carrying word is a word that carries **meaning** and has an element of **choice**.

For example, if the child is near his coat peg at break time and an adult is there holding his coat and says *“put your coat on”*, the child does not need to understand any of the words because s/he can see what is needed from the context.

So, given this situation “Put your coat on” = **0** information carrying words

Games and activities can be set up so that the equipment and language can be manipulated to control the level of understanding required.

**One Information Carrying Word Level**

A dressing up game could be played using the child’s coat, hat, scarf, boots or clothes suitable for a class topic (so these games can be used to reinforce particular vocabulary too).

If you say, *“where’s your coat?”* The child has to understand the word **coat** because now there is an element of choice; you could have said, *“where’s your hat?”*

So, given this situation “Where’s your coat?” = **1** information carrying word

“Where’s your hat?” = **1** information carrying word

**Two Information Carrying Word Level**

You can add someone else’s clothes. If the children are called Sophie and Joshua, you now have Sophie’s hat, coat, scarf, and boots and Joshua’s hat, coat, scarf, and boots.

If you say, *“where’s Sophie’s coat?”* the child has to understand “Sophie” as opposed to “Joshua” and “coat” as opposed to “hat”.

So, given this situation “Where’s Sophie’s coat?” = **2** information carrying words  
“Where’s Joshua’s hat ?” = **2** information carrying words

Writing the words with a line under them shows that these are the **information carrying words**, i.e., they are interchangeable with other words from the same group. It is quicker to record the sentences in this way than to write out all the possible combinations every time. You can then place a tick or a cross above the information carrying word according to whether the child followed that part of the instruction or not.

**Three Information Carrying Word Level**

The language can be extended in numerous ways to incorporate different concepts and to add variety.

For example:

1. You could add another **noun** (e.g., a place)  
   “Put Sophie’s coat in the cupboard” = **3** information carrying words  
   “Put Joshua’s hat in the box” = **3** information carrying words
2. You could add the concept of **position**:  
   “Put the coat on the box” = **3** information carrying words  
   “Put the hat under the basket” = **3** information carrying words
3. You could add the concept of **size**:  
   “Put the big coat in the box” = **3** information carrying words  
   “Put the little hat in the basket” = **3** information carrying words

**Top Tips**

For more examples at each level, please see the individual handouts on our website.

* **Take turns:** Once the child understands the game then let them take turns to give the instructions. This not only helps maintain interest but is also a good way to encourage expressive language because the child has had plenty of examples of the structure of the sentence.  
  To introduce the idea, you take the objects and say “Now, you be the teacher. What would you like me to do?” You may need to prompt at first “You want me to put the…”  
  If the child points to the objects or says ‘this or ‘here’ try and encourage them to name the objects by moving them out of reach. If the child only says part of the sentence, repeat it using the correct words and grammar so that you provide an appropriate model.  
  You can also use pictures which are often easier because they are less distracting.
* **Check vocabulary:** Prior to starting the activity, name all the equipment with the child to check that they are familiar with the vocabulary. Ensure that any concepts introduced are understood at a single word level before using them as a information carrying word in a longer sentence, e.g., they need to understand big before understanding big apple.
* **Be careful with eye movements:** Children use clues from situations to help them understand, and it is as easy to give clues by looking at what you want them to do. For example, in the instruction ‘give me the apple’, if you look at the apple as you say it, the instruction will no longer contain **1** information carrying word level but will be **0** information carrying words. This is because the child does not have to understand the language, they only have to watch your eyes! To help you to avoid eye pointing, **look at the child** when you give an instruction. If you do this, you cannot look at the equipment.
* **Be careful with pointing/gesturing:** We often automatically point and/or gesture to what we are talking about which will, again, mean that the child just needs to look and not understand the language. If you know that you use your hands when talking, you may need to hold items or even sit on your hands to stop yourself from gesturing/pointing.
* **Be prepared:** Decide on the instruction before you start to give it. It is helpful to write down some examples, this will stop you from pausing and therefore changing the level of the instruction.  
  For example, ‘Put the apple in the box’ is a **2** information carrying word sentence but if you break the sentence up because you are thinking of the word, or if you repeat a word this changes the level, i.e., ‘Put the coat … … in the box’ is 2 x **1** information carrying word sentences.