

The EET and AAC: Expanding Language with a Multi-Sensory Approach

"Tell me everything you know about an apple" I asked my verbose 4-year-old daughter.

"You eat it, it's red, and it tastes good!" she replied enthusiastically.

"Do you know anything else about an apple?" I probed.

"It's a fruit that grows on a tree" she stated.

"Is that ALL you know about an apple? Is there anything else you can tell me?"

"Nope that's all I know, mommy."

Five attributes. That's all she could generate on her own. But I *knew* she knew more, so I taught her a strategy for defining and describing vocabulary called the Expanding Expression Tool (EET). It took 2 minutes to teach her the song while walking through the different colored beads on a chain – each representing a different language element.

Sung to the tune of *Skip to My Lou*:

♪ Green group ♪ Blue do ♪ What does it look like? ♪ What is it made of? ♪ Pink parts ♪ White where? ♪ What else do I know? ♪



"Now tell me what you know about an apple. Start with Green Group. What is the category?"

"Food or fruit."

"Okay, Blue Do – what do you do with an apple?"

Excitedly and with wide eyes, she said, "You eat it, bake it, bite it, pick it, cut it, peel it, dip it!"

"Yep! What does an apple look like?"

"It's round and smooth. It's small. It's yellow, red, or green."

"Okay, but what is it made of or where does it come from?"

"A tree! It grows from a seed into a tree and then you pick it at the orchard!"

"Fantastic! Now, what are all its parts?"

"It has a stem, seeds, peel, and juice."

"Where do you find it?"

"In the grocery store, in my lunchbox, on the teacher's desk."

"What else do you know about apples?"

"They are healthy. They taste good with peanut butter or caramel. They are sometimes sweet, sometimes sour. They are crunchy and juicy."

"You sure do know a LOT about apples!"

"Yep!"

From 5 attributes to 30+ in a time span of about 5 minutes. That is the **magic** of the EET! Now imagine the possibilities of using this tool with students who use augmentative-alternative communication (AAC) for expressive language!

With the EET you can start at a single word level or advance to phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and even reports which makes it an ideal tool for students of all ages and abilities who use core vocabulary based AAC systems. You can break it down into each component (categories, functions, attributes, parts, places, etc.) to teach the different language elements and then put it all together to define and describe words. There are endless ideas for implementing the EET and all can be adapted for use with an AAC device: riddles, secret object guessing game, show & tell, language webs, compare & contrast, biographies or autobiographies, writing from prior knowledge, summarizing... It will not only increase your students' verbal expression, but their written expression as well! Use the EET to write with the AAC device -

it's a great way to target syntax and morphology with kids who are putting 3+ words together in phrases and sentences!



You might be thinking, "But a lot of the language created with the EET is noun-based. How does that help my AAC student build their use of core vocabulary on the device?" First, I recommend you read this [blog article I wrote on Descriptive vs. Referential Teaching](#). It will help explain how to take a content or academic word and break it down into a core word description. This is an important skill for AAC users because if a particular word is not stored in their device or if they don't know where to access it, they can use core words to "talk around it" by defining and describing it. And the EET gives them an organized and systematic way of doing so! For example, if I were trying to tell you something and the word wasn't in my AAC device, could you guess what I'm talking about if I said, "animal, magical, looks like horse, thing on head, in stories"? Likewise, in the example above, if my daughter didn't know the word "peel" when she was explaining the parts of an apple, she could have substituted it with "part on the outside that is shiny and red". An AAC user at the 1-2 word level might just say "outside" or "shiny stuff" which would then give me an opportunity to model other vocabulary in the device to build on what they've said.



The [Expanding Expression Tool](#) was created by Sara L. Smith, speech-language pathologist (SLP). It is a multi-sensory approach to improve oral and written language skills through defining & describing, making associations, comparing & contrasting, and categorizing. It is an awesome tool for general and special education teachers, literacy coaches, reading specialists, parents, and SLPs to build language with students of any age or ability level. Although the [EET Kit](#) comes with a manual, I highly recommend attending a full-day training for a thorough explanation of the research behind the technique and the methodology to implement it correctly in a fun variety of ways across subject matter and age groups. If you have questions about the EET, contact Sara directly at eetsmiths@gmail.com or (989) 225-0436.



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