Language and Literacy
Grammar: Sentences

What: Making sentences involves combining words together and moving beyond one- or two-word observations or commands. The length of children's sentences gradually gets longer and more complex as they learn how to put different parts of speech together. Sentence length and complexity also grow with children's experience and opportunities.

Why: Speaking in sentences allows children to convey messages and needs, ask questions, make comments, and respond to others. An important developmental milestone, communicating in sentences is critical to engaging in various social interactions and learning opportunities, and in gaining independence across many aspects of life.

How:

1. **Listen and Learn**
   - As children play and interact, make a point to eavesdrop. Listen to their conversations and the way they communicate. Try not to intervene so you can hear their authentic conversations.
   - As you listen, document exactly what you hear children say. How complex are their sentences? What different parts of speech (e.g., verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, etc.) do they include in their sentences? For children using assistive technology (AT) devices, make note of the complexity of their sentences, as well.

2. **Mr. Microphone**
   - Create a stage-like setting or other situation in which children talk or tell stories with a microphone or other electronic device. Invite your students to share something they did or plan to do, and ask open-ended questions to make the experience fun and unintimidating.
   - Record what children say so you have a log of their sentence complexity. If your students enjoy it, repeat the activity periodically to yield more authentic examples of the sentences children say — and to gain insight on how they develop over time.

3. **Welcome Chat**
   - As children arrive at school, make a point to have a brief conversation with each child. Ask open-ended questions that encourage them to respond in longer sentences versus single words. For example, “Tell me about something you’d like to do in school today.”
   - Jot down what your students say, and use your notes as a record of their sentence complexity.

4. **Picture Talk**
   - Invite children to bring in pictures, or use a program/school camera to take pictures. Then create an opportunity for kids to tell their peers about their pictures. Encourage them to ask questions and have conversations about the pictures.
   - As your students talk, write down exactly what they say. Consider taking a video and then watching it with or without the kids at a later point to tune in to sentence complexity.

5. **Peer Reading**
   - Invite children to sit and explore books of interest together. Encourage them to tell each other about the story, make observations about pictures, and ask questions.
As they share the book, take note of the sentences they use. Jot down what you hear, focusing on the different parts of speech in the typical sentences children say.

6. Family Chat

Let families know that you’re assessing children's sentence complexity, and ask them to help by jotting down some things they hear their child say at home or on-the-go. Give some tips and examples, and invite families to designate a specific time of day, such as breakfast, dinner, or bath time, for this activity. Also invite them to consider audio or video as an alternative to writing (let families choose), and create a way for them to share the information.
What: Questions enable us to seek information and evoke responses from others. Typically, our pitch or intonation rises toward the end of a question. There are a variety of ways to ask a question. For instance, we can structure questions with auxiliary or helping verbs (e.g., is, did, could have, could) and inverted verbs (e.g., putting the verb before the subject). We can also use wh questions (e.g., when, where, why, how) and embed clauses (e.g., embedding words that include a subject and verb within a main clause, such as, *Is the girl, with the green shirt, coming too?*).

Why: Learning to ask questions is essential to receiving information, and being able to form questions to get the information desired requires an understanding of how to ask questions. Question asking is central to learning, reasoning, understanding, and relationship building.

How:
1. Primed to Ask
   - Offer interesting alternatives to your daily routine, and wait for children to ask questions. For example, introduce a new fruit at snack time or take a different route to get to the playground. Rather than alerting the children ahead of time, pause and wait for the questions to come.
   - Make note of the types of questions children ask. Do they initiate asking questions or need encouragement? Are the questions clear and understandable or convoluted and drawn out?

2. Plan It
   - Involve your students in activity planning, such as making plans to go on a walk, visit the library, or make Jell-O for snack. Model asking questions (e.g., *How will we get there? What will we do? What do we need, and how much?*) as a way of gently nudging and encouraging kids to ask questions, too.
   - Listen for the kinds of questions asked. Are the questions in context? How complex are they?

3. Wonder Walk
   - Talk to children about going on a “wonder walk,” where they ask questions about things in which they wonder. Give some examples. For instance, you might wonder about the name of a particular plant, or perhaps you wonder how something (such as a lamp or lawn mower) works. Make sure students understand that a wonder walk is an opportunity to tap into curiosity and ask questions—and when no one in your group can answer, you’ll write down the question and work together to figure out how to get the answer at a later point.
   - As children ask questions, jot down what they say as a way of documenting the kinds of questions children ask. Be sure to use quotes to capture exact words, and indicate the name of the child asking the question. Listen for how children ask and answer questions with each other.

4. Just Playing
   - As children engage in playful interactions, listen to what they say to each other. Try to hang back, without intervening, so you can capture what kids say spontaneously.
   - Listen for questions being asked. Make note of different questions, and use that information to help you identify where children are on the learning progression and to guide future planning.
5. Curious Readers
   - Introduce a new book and talk briefly about the topic. For instance, if the story is about penguins, ask them what they know — and want to know — about penguins before you start reading. Encourage children to ask questions.
   - As they think and begin to ask questions, jot down the different types of questions they ask.

6. Family Chat
   - Ask families to share observations about their child’s question asking outside of school. Consider using these prompts: What kinds of questions does your child ask, and how often? Can you think of any examples? Are there particular times of day or activities during which your child asks more questions?
What: Prepositions are words that describe relationships among other words in a sentence. Often, prepositions come before a noun or pronoun in a sentence — *Put your shoes in the basket*, for example. Here, the preposition *in* describes the relationship between *shoes* and *basket*.

Why: Prepositions are a core part of functional communication, and learning about them fosters children’s ability to use prepositions to describe relationships.

How:

1. **Behind the Box**
   - Find a box or block sturdy and big enough for children to stand on but also light enough for them to move. Use premade preposition cards or create your own, and invite students to pick a card and then position themselves accordingly. For instance, one card might prompt them to stand *in front of* the box, and another *beside* or *on top of* the box. Talk about the role the preposition plays — and, for fun, what they would need to go *through* the box. (Note: You can adapt this activity with a small toy and box that children can manipulate, so the toy could go *under* or *behind* the box, for example.)
   - As children play the game, make note of their understanding and use of the prepositions. Do they understand the concept? Do they use them appropriately? Are some easier than others to understand?

2. **Music and Movement**
   - Integrate prepositional phrases into familiar songs, and encourage children to move to that position. For example, *If you’re happy and you know it, stand beside a friend* (or *sit on your carpet, stand in the circle*, etc.).
   - As you introduce prepositions in songs, watch for and note children’s understanding. Invite them to use prepositions to come up with their own phrases to add to songs, and make note of their understanding.

3. **Puppet Play**
   - Provide open-ended puppet or stuffed animal play opportunities. Then, as kids play with the puppets, ask simple questions about what’s happening. For example: *Where is your elephant puppet going? What will he do next? What kinds of games does he like to play?*
   - Listen to what children say as they play and respond to your questions, and make note of prepositions they use naturally.

4. **Hide and Seek**
   - Play hide and seek in the classroom. When everyone is found, talk about where children choose to hide (e.g., under the table, beside the plant, in the kitchen area, etc.). Invite children to describe where they found their peers, and encourage peers to talk about where they chose to hide. Play the game outside, too, for variety.
   - During the discussion, listen for the use of prepositions. Do your students show an understanding of prepositions? What prepositions do they use? Are some more difficult than others?
5. Obstacle Course
- Make an obstacle course with the children. Use prepositions as you talk together about what they’ll need to do to go through the course. For example, you can use phrases like *through the tube*, *under the chair*, and *between the blocks*. Encourage kids to talk about the actions, rather than just telling them the actions. Questions like these can help: *How would you make through this section? What if you get stuck here? How do you get around the blocks?*
- As you develop the obstacle course, and as your students take turns going through it, document their use and understanding of different prepositions.

6. Family Chat
- Ask families to share what directions they give their child that involves prepositions (e.g., put the cup in the dishwasher, put your jacket on the hook, etc.). Does their child seem to understand and use prepositions? Encourage families to listen and report back on their child’s use of prepositions.
Language and Literacy
Grammar: Inflections

What: Inflection refers to the extra letter or letters added to words to change their grammatical form. For example, adding /s/ or /es/ to make a word plural, adding /ed/ to make it past tense, and adding /er/ and /est/ to express comparatives. When learning inflections, it is common for children to make errors, such as overgeneralizing (e.g., adding /ed/ to express past tense, as in, ‘he goed to the park with me’). Making errors and figuring out when and how to use inflections is a natural part of the learning process.

Why: Learning to use inflections is a key to functional communication. It’s also a stepping stone to differentiating things like the past from the present and singles from multiples, and in comparing and ranking items (e.g., biggest and smallest, warmer and colder).

How:

1. Action Pictures
   - Take pictures with a camera or clip pictures from magazines of people doing different things, such as running, walking, swimming, and sleeping. Create a book with the pictures, and then invite children to look at the book and talk about what they see happening in the pictures.
   - As children talk about the pictures, listen for their use of inflections. Do they add /ing/ to describe the action? Do they use other inflections as they talk about the pictures?

2. Yesterday
   - During group activities, talk about things that happened yesterday. Use pictures or the daily schedule, as needed, to help children remember. For example, *We painted, it rained, and we cleaned the water table*. Think about what happened so you can prompt kids as needed.
   - Listen for how children talk about the things that happened. Do they use inflections to describe past activities? Do they overgeneralize with the use of /ed/ — and say words like goed, eated, and runned? How do they use irregular past tense verbs (e.g., ate, drank, ran, hit, hurt, went, saw, gave, etc.)?

3. Comparing
   - Gather objects like shells, blocks, and toy cars that children can pick up and explore. Then have them compare items in terms of size, appearance, color, and more. Model the activity by using inflection words (bigger, smaller, biggest, prettiest, longer, etc.) to compare the items.
   - As children explore and compare, listen for their use of comparative inflections. Do they use them regularly? What inflections post a challenge?

4. Peer Play
   - Create opportunities for children to actively engage in playful interactions. Make time to hang back and listen to children in different play areas.
   - Listen to what the kids say, and strive document exactly what you hear (you can use quotation marks in your notes to indicate exact words). Then reflect on what you hear and observe so you can better understand how or if children are using inflections.

5. More or Less Snacks
o Provide a snack that includes many pieces or a variety of serving sizes, such as gold fish, apple slices, and cheese chunks. Engage children in a discussion about the number of pieces they have (e.g., *Who has the most? Least?*), and talk about the size (e.g., *Who has the biggest? Who has a bigger/smaller piece?*).

o Listen closely to children’s discussions, and take note of the words and inflections they use naturally. Prompt them as needed by asking questions (e.g., *What do you think about these two pieces? How would you compare them?*), and make a point to model the use of inflections (e.g., *I think this piece is the biggest*).

6. Family Chat

o Explain inflections to family members and go over word endings like *ed, es, er, and est*. Also tell them you’re spending class time listening for words spoken by children and determining how they use and understand inflections. Ask families to share and report back on whether their child uses inflections in their everyday language outside of school. Encourage families to share examples.