

Using your Function of Words Cards

The Function of Words work is designed to give children a tangible impression of the jobs of different words in phrases – grammar. But that is not all it does; it also instills in them an understanding of the importance of word order and, most importantly, inspires them to practice reading words. This last point is often overlooked. This work is not advanced work. It is specifically designed to ease the beginning reader into reading more and more words, phonetic and non-phonetic. Function of Words activities draw interest to the act of reading – they make reading fun.

Prerequisites

To succeed with Function of Words activities, children must be solid phonetic readers (including the standard phonograms) and have a growing repertoire of sight words (like the, a, one). Along the continuum of Montessori language presentations, they have done solid work with:

- The movable alphabet (writing their own words and phrases)
- The phonetic object box/phonetic 3-part cards
- The phonogram object box/phonogram 3-part cards
- Puzzle words
- Labeling the environment (using post-it notes to handwrite and affix labels to the parts of their body, items in the classroom, components of a work, etc.)
- Reading some 3-part cards

Materials

Each of the Function of Words activities should be contained in its own cloth pouch, basket, or box. They must be placed on the language shelves in the sequence specified. Always sequence the shelves from the top left to the top right. Continue to the next shelf if necessary, again in order from left-to-right. This creates a clear image in the child's mind of what comes next. This is particularly important for younger children who are eager to get their hands on the work they see the older children doing. When they are interested in work that they are not yet able to do, you simply say, *"That IS such a wonderful work. I can't wait to show you. But before you do that one, you need to do this one and this one and this one...you have to do all of these before it will be time for this one. It takes a long time. It took David two years. He's five now. I bet by the time you're five you'll be ready too."* Be sure to honor the sequence of presentations. Even if a child appears ready for a more challenging work, bring him quickly through the preceding presentations to make sure there are no gaps in his learning.

There are three other items you will need: a Grammar Symbols Box, a Writing Tray, and a Keepsakes Tray. The Symbols Box is a box (with a lid) that is divided into compartments. Each compartment holds about 20 of each of the grammar symbols. The symbols themselves are usually made out of sturdy plastic or wood but you can make your own out of card stock (included in this set). The symbols needed for the Children's House Function of Words work (for children ages 5 to 6) are as follows:

- Article: small triangle, light blue
- Adjective: medium triangle, dark blue
- Noun: large triangle, black
- Conjunction: thin rectangle, pink
- Preposition; crescent, green
- Verb: large circle, red
- Adverb: medium circle, orange

The Writing Tray should include:

- A container of writing pencils (many different sizes/shapes but NO erasers)
- A pencil sharpener (and container to hold the shavings)
- Stacks of blank paper in the following approximate sizes
 - 4.25" x 1.5" (for writing individual words)
 - 6" x 1.5" (for writing short phrases)
 - 8.5" x 1.5" (for writing longer phrases)
- Small, plain boards to write upon when working at a rug; clipboards are not preferred

You may also like to create another tray that holds the materials the children will need to embellish and create keepsakes out of the handwritten work made in the course of doing the Function of Words activities. Be sure to give the children presentations on how to use these materials, for example, how to make a booklet out of their word slips. This Keepsakes Tray can include:

- One pair of scissors
- One container of colored pencils (special colors beyond those provided for the metal insets), markers, or pastels (along with a sharpener if necessary)
- One glue stick
- Tape in a desk-style tape dispenser
- One small stapler
- One hole punch
- Booklet rings and/or yarn/ribbon

Presentations

All presentations, also called lessons, begin and end in the same way:

1. Invite/entice the child to do the work with you.
2. Go together to get the materials.
3. At the shelf where the materials are maintained, touch and name the work. For example, say, "This is the Article work. Would you like to carry it to our work area or shall I?"
4. Give the presentation (as described herein)
5. At the end of the presentation:
 - If the child appears capable, free him/her to work independently using the prepared labels or labels s/he creates on her own (e.g., writing adjective phrases for items on the farm)
 - If the child needs more support before being successful with independent work, say, "Let's do this work together again soon."
6. Clean up together (be mindful of your hand movements and precise and consistent in your handling of the cards) and return the materials in perfect order to their designated location on the shelf.
7. Celebrate the work: Many of these activities include the creation of paper slips containing words and/or phrases. A good follow-up activity is to decorate those slips. For example, you might say, "Would you like to paste these slips onto some paper and make them into a little book?"

Order of Presentations

In the Montessori program, we are continually building on the child's previous successes. As he becomes facile with reading the names of objects via the phonetic and 3-part card work, we introduce words that define objects: articles and adjectives. Next we present the words that connect objects: conjunctions and prepositions. Finally we move onto actions and the words that define actions (adverbs). We pull it all together with commands that combine all of these components into longer and longer phrases. The presentations are listed here in order.

Lesson #1: The Article

Bring the work and your Writing Tray to a table. Take out the cards with the photos. Name each photo and place it along the top of the table so that each photo/set of photos has its own distinct column. Leave space under each photo to place the paper slip. Say, *"I'm thinking of one of these pictures but I'm not going to tell you which one."* Write 'a leaf' on a slip and give it to the child. Help the child as necessary to read the slip and place it beneath the appropriate picture. Continue for all of the leaves, shells, and chipmunks. Then write, 'a moon,' and give that slip to the child. When s/he puts the slip beneath the photo, look at the slip and say, *"Oh, I made a mistake!"* Cross out 'a' and write 'the.' Repeat for the volcano and the sunset. Have fun noticing your mistakes! Say, *"The rule is that if you have only one, you say 'the' but if you have more than one you say 'a.' What's the rule?"* Encourage them to repeat it. Mix up the labels or photos and have the children sort them back out. Remind them to read the whole slip as they work. Say, *"You've done such wonderful work with the article. Next time you can use these prepared slips to do this work alone or with your friends without any help at all!"* Show them the prepared slips. Sort the word cards into two stacks (objects and articles) and repeat as above. Later, inspire them to make up their own written labels for this work and encourage them to take their paper slips and paste them onto paper or bind them into a small book that they can decorate.

Lesson #2: Adjective Box 1

Bring the work and your Writing Tray to a table. Spread out a work rug on the floor (at a distance from the table that works for the child) and carefully place the photo cards randomly on the rug. Go back to the table. Say, *"I'm thinking of one of those pictures on the rug. I'm going to write you a note. See if you can bring me the one I want!"* Write 'the cookie' on a slip and give it to the child. When the child gives you the cookie, say, *"Oh, but I wanted something special."* Write 'frosted' on a slip. Say, *"Give me this kind of cookie instead."* When the child brings you the frosted cookie, place it carefully on your table with the slips just below it. Say, *"So here we have frosted the cookie...is that right?"* Have fun. Shuffle the slips and read them again. *"Now we have the cookie frosted ...is that right?"* Tear the article into a separate slip and place the words in the correct order. Say, *"I guess the order really matters."* Now write, 'the hat.' When the child brings you a hat photo, say, *"Oh, but I wanted a different one."* Write 'party' on the slip. Say, *"Give me this kind of hat instead."* Place the photo and slips on the table. Ask the child to help you get the words in the proper order. Repeat for the other photos until they are all labeled on the table. Say, *"Now I'm going to show you something really special: The Symbol Box!"* Point to the slips on the top left of the table. Ask, *"Which of these words told us the thing I wanted?"* Place the black triangle above the word 'cookie.' Ask, *"Which word told you the kind of cookie I wanted?"* Place the dark blue triangle above the word 'frosted.' Ask, *"Which word told you if I wanted one or more?"* Place the small blue triangle above the word 'the.' Say, *"Go ahead and put the symbols on the other phrases."* Help them as they need it. Free the children to repeat the work by showing them the prepared slips. Say, *"Next time you'd like to do this work, you can use these prepared slips or you can write you own."*

Lesson #3: Adjective Box 2—Logical Adjective

Take the stack of cards with black text and lay them out in a column. Ask the child to lay out the cards with blue text in a column just to the left of your column. Point to the top row and say, “Read this.” Ask, “Does that make sense?” If not, take the adjective away and start an upside-down discard pile. Go through all cards this way. Say, “Let’s see if we can find ones that fit.” Take the first discarded adjective card and hold it next to the first free noun card. Ask, “Does this make sense?” If yes, place it next to the card. If no, try it with the next free noun card. Do this until all cards are matched. You can rearrange to find better matches. Say, “Let’s get the symbol box.” Ask, “Which of these words told us the thing?” Place the black triangle above the noun. Ask, “Which word told us the kind of thing?” Place the dark blue triangle above the adjective. Say, “Go ahead and put the symbols above the other phrases.” Free them to repeat the work independently.

Lesson #4: Adjective Box 2—Adjective Chain

Say, “I want to show you a new way to use Adjective Box 2.” Place the stack of noun cards in front of them. Say, “Choose your favorite one of these.” Put the other noun cards aside. Say, “Let’s see how many of these cards work with the one you chose.” Hold each adjective card to the left of the noun and ask, “Does this make sense?” If not, put it in an upside-down discard pile. If yes, place it to the left of the noun. Keep going until you have a long chain of adjectives next to the noun. Ask, “What did we make?” Read the humorous result together. Get the symbol box and symbolize each word.

Lesson #5: The Conjunction

Bring the Conjunction work and Writing Tray (including a pink pencil) to a table. Say, “I’m going to write you a message. Bring me what it says!” Write ‘the green pencil’ on a slip and give it to a child. Continue writing slips for the children (‘the red pencil,’ and ‘the blue pencil’). Have them place the objects on the table above the matching paper slips. Take the pink ribbon out of the container. Line the pencils up on the ribbon and tie the ribbon together. Say, “Now we have the green pencil and the red pencil and the blue pencil.” Use a pink pencil to write the word ‘and’ on two slips of paper. Say, “The conjunction pulls the objects together just like the ribbon pulls the pencils together.” Now put the ‘and’ slips in the wrong place and ask, “Is this right?” Keep transposing it and have fun! Say, “Can you put these in the right order for me?” Help them if they need it. Say, “Now let’s get the symbol box.” When the child is ready, say, “Go ahead and put the symbols over the ones that you know.” Help them if they need it. Ask, “Which word ties the others together?” Place the pink rectangle symbol over the conjunctions. Say, “Next time you can do this work without any help. Just use these prepared slips or you could even make your own slips.” Show them the printed cards in the Conjunction work.

Lesson #6: The Preposition

Bring the Preposition work and your Writing Tray (including a green pencil) to a table. Say, “I’m going to write you a message. Bring me what it says!” (Note: This lesson is written to be used with a silk flower arrangement in a vase. If you don’t have such an item, you can change the words to describe three objects that would normally be found in or on another object.) Write ‘the red flower’ on a slip of paper and hand it to the child. When s/he returns, have her place the object and the slip together on the table. Repeat for ‘the blue flower,’ ‘the yellow flower,’ and ‘the vase.’ Write ‘and’ on two slips of paper and line the words up so they read ‘the red flower and the blue flower and the yellow flower.’ Now, use a green pencil to write ‘in’ on a slip of paper and have the children read it. Say, “Let’s put ‘in’ in order here and see what it tells us to do.” Put the slips in order so the phrase reads ‘the red flower and the blue flower and the yellow flower in the vase.’ Have the children read it and move the objects accordingly.

Use the green pencil to write 'under' on a slip of paper and replace the 'in' slip with 'under.' Have the child read it and move the objects accordingly. Use the green pencil to write 'beside' on a slip of paper and replace the 'under' slip with 'beside.' Have the children read it and move the objects accordingly. Get the symbol box ready. Say, *"Put the symbols above the words that you know."* Point to the preposition and say, *"This word tells us how everything fits together. It tells us their position."* Put the green preposition symbol above the preposition. Ask, *"What were the other words like this we had?"* Change the preposition slips and move the objects so the child can see that the different words have the same job. Review the rule by asking, *"Which word tells us position and how things fit together?"* Say, *"Next time you can do this work without any help. Just use these prepared slips."* Show them the printed cards.

Lesson #7: Verb Box 1—Introduction

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Say, *"I'm going to give you a message. Bring me what it says!"* Hand one card to each child. Say again, *"Give me what the card says. Come put it on the table next to your card."* Really insist on it and have fun with the children who have a verb card. Review what's on the table and say, *"I've asked three times for Sarah to give me what's on her card and she won't do it."* The kids should be laughing at you! Ask, *"Why won't you give it to me?"* Differentiate between a verb and a noun. Say, *"Oh, you can't give it to me because it's not a thing, it's an action!"* Bring the symbol box to your work area. Point to the nouns and say, *"Show me what symbol these objects get."* Place a black triangle above the noun cards. Place the big red circles by the verbs and say, *"We use these big red circles for these action words because these words have a lot of energy, just like the sun."* Mix up the symbols and the cards and have the children re-symbolize them. Say, *"That was fun! Next time you can do this work without any help. You can use these cards."*

Lesson #8: Verb Box 2—Charades

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Hand the first child a card and say, *"Some people call this game charades. Here's how you play. Sandy, you do what this card says and Emma will tell us what you're doing. Don't let us see what your card says!"* After the action is acted out, lay the card on the rug. Hand the next child a card and repeat as above. When all the cards are out, get the symbol box and say, *"Show me the symbol we use for these action words...words that have energy like the sun."* Place the symbols above all of the cards. Say, *"That was fun! Next time you can do this work without any help. You could even write your own cards to use."* Inspire them to be creative and make their own verb cards for a new game of charades. Clean up together.

Lesson #9: Adverb Box 1—Charades

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Say, *“Let’s sort these cards into two piles: one for the orange words and one for the red words.”* Have the children help you. When they are sorted, turn the orange adverb pile upside down. Then point to the red pile and say, *“Each of you can choose one card from this pile and you have to do what it tells you to do.”* Have them stop after a minute or so. Then say, *“Now I’m going to give you a secret that tells you how to do what you were just doing.”* Give each child an adverb card. Have the children do the revised actions. Say, *“Let’s show everyone what your cards say.”* Have the children place their cards on the rug. Have fun discussing the phrases. Offer the children the opportunity to take another card and play again. When they are finished, get the symbol box. Say, *“Put the symbols on the ones that you know.”* Put the small orange symbol above an adverb and say, *“These words work with our big energy words because they tell us how to do something.”* Point to an adverb and ask, *“What does this word do?”* Encourage them to repeat the rule and symbolize the remaining cards. Then, mix up the cards, create new piles and encourage them to do the work again. Say, *“That was fun! Next time you can do this work without any help.”* When they are ready, inspire them to be creative and make their own verb and adverb cards for a new game.

Lesson #10: Adverb Box 2—Logical Adverb

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Work with the children to layout the red words in a column just to the right of the orange words. Point to the first row and say, *“Read this.” Does that make sense?”* If not, take the adverb away and start an upside-down discard pile. Go through all cards this way. Say, *“Let’s see if we can find ones that fit.”* Take the first orange card from the discard pile and hold it next to the first free red card. Read it and ask the child if it makes sense. If yes, place it next to the card. If no, try it with the next free red card. Do this until all cards are matched. You can rearrange to find better matches. If the children don’t naturally discover that some of the words work on the right side rather than the left, ask them, *“What do you think will happen if we put these orange cards on the other side of the red cards? Let’s find out!”* Consider whether each word makes more sense on the right or the left side. You should end up with some words on each side of the red column. Explain the rule, *“Sometimes these words work in one order and sometimes they work in another order. It depends on how you use them.”* Get the symbol box and say, *“Put the symbols on the ones you know.”* Help them as necessary. Say, *“That was fun! Next time you can do this work without any help.”* Inspire them to be creative and make their own cards for a new game.

Lesson #11: Adverb Box 2—Adverb Chain

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Say, *“I want to show you a new game to play with Adverb Box 2. Can you bring it to our work area?”* Place the cards in two piles on the work area. Point to the verb pile and say, *“Can you choose one of these action words for me?” Choose one that you really like.”* Take the chosen one and put the other cards aside and upside-down (to isolate the work). Say, *“Let’s see how many of these orange cards work with your action word.”* Hold each orange card to the left of the verb and ask the child, *“Does this make sense?”* If not, try it to the right of the verb. Place it where it works or if it doesn’t make sense on the left or the right, put it in an upside-down discard pile. Keep going until you have a long chain of adverbs surrounding the verb. Say, *“Let’s see what we made!”* and read back the chain together. Comment on the result. Have fun! Restate the rule, *“Sometimes these words work in one order and sometimes they work in another order. It depends on how you use them.”* Get the symbol box and say, *“Put the symbols on the ones you know.”* Help them as necessary. Say, *“That was fun! Next time you can do this work without any help.”* When they are ready, inspire them to create their own verb and adverb cards for a new game.

Lesson #12: Verb Box 3—Transitive & Intransitive

For your own knowledge, review the definition of transitive and intransitive verbs; you will not need to use these terms with the children. A transitive verb takes a direct object (I read the book) while an intransitive verb does not (I read). Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Hand half of the children a card that has a verb and a subject and give the other children a card that has only a verb. Place any remaining cards in a stack, upside-down on the work space. Say, *"Each of you has to do what your card tells you to do. Don't let anyone else see your card!"* After a minute or so ask the children with the transitive slips, *"Why aren't you doing anything?"* Say, *"Let's show everyone what your cards say."* Place them on the rug and get the symbol box. Say, *"Let's see if the symbols can help us figure out what's going on. Go ahead and put the symbols on the ones that you know."* Say, *"All of these words are action words but some of them go on and on and on while others last for just a short time. Isn't that wild!"* Say, *"That was fun! Next time you can do this work without any help."*

Lesson #13: Verb Box 4—Syntax

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Place the cards in an upside-down stack on the work rug. Say, *"Each of you can choose one card and then do what it tells you to do. We'll guess what you're doing."* Have the children place their cards on the rug when they're done. Get the symbol box and say, *"Put the symbols on the ones you know."* Say, *"Let's get some paper slips and I'll show you something fun."* Copy a phrase from the prepared cards onto the paper and then cut or tear each word from the phrase into its own paper slip. Say, *"Let's see what happens if we try it this way."* Rearrange the words so they don't make sense. Then, rearrange them so they do make sense but are different from the original phrase. For example, the phrase 'open the door' will be rearranged to read 'the open door.' Ask, *"Is that right?"* Demonstrate that it's different from the first one but it still works. It shows the result of what happened. Say, *"Let's see if the symbols will help us figure out what happened. Put the symbols on the ones you know."* The symbols will include an adjective triangle for 'open' now instead of a verb circle. Say, *"Wow! The same word has two different jobs if you put it in a different place. You can see that the order of words is very important."*

Lesson #14: Verb Box 5—Mental Activity

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Place the cards in an upside-down stack on the work rug. Say, *"Each of you can choose one card and then do what it tells you to do."* After a minute or so ask the children with the mental activity slips, *"Why aren't you doing anything?"* Say, *"Show everyone what your cards say."* Place them on the mat or table and get the symbol box. Say, *"Let's see if the symbols can help us figure out what's going on. Go ahead and put the symbols on the ones that you know."* Say, *"All of these words are action words because they are full of energy. Even though you can't see the action or the energy, it's still there. Using your mind is a lot of work!"* Talk about working in an office or at a computer and how that is tiring because it uses a lot of mental energy.

Lesson #15: Command Box 1—Two Actions

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Place the cards in an upside-down stack on the work rug. Say, *"Each of you can choose one card and then do what it tells you to do. We'll guess what you're doing."* Have them lay their card on the work rug after everyone has guessed. Get the symbol box and say, *"Put the symbols on the ones you know."* Say, *"Let's get the Writing Tray and I'll show you something fun."* Copy a phrase from the prepared cards onto the paper and then cut or tear each word from the phrase into a separate paper slip. Say, *"Let's see what happens if we try it this way."* Switch the order of

the verbs but keep the conjunction in the middle. For example, instead of 'brush and comb,' the rearranged phrase would read 'comb and brush.' Ask, "Can you still do it? Does it still make sense?" Have fun with this. Then, encourage the children to help you repeat the process for the other phrases. Symbolize the handwritten phrases each time they make sense.

Lesson #16: Command Box 2—Two Actions/One Object

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Place the cards in an upside-down stack on the work rug. Say, "Each of you can choose one card and then do what it tells you to do. We'll guess what you're doing." Have them lay their card on the work rug after everyone has guessed. Get the symbol box and say, "Put the symbols on the ones you know." Say, "Let's get the Writing Tray and I'll show you something fun." Copy a phrase from the prepared cards onto a slip of paper and then cut or tear each word from the phrase into a separate paper slip. Say, "Let's see what happens if we try it this way." Switch the order of the verbs. For example, instead of 'open a book and read,' the rearranged phrase would say 'read and open a book.' Ask, "Can you still do it? Does it still make sense?" Have fun with this. Then, encourage the children to help you repeat the process for the other phrases. Symbolize the handwritten phrases each time they make sense.

Lesson #17: Command Box 3—Two Actions/Two Objects

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Place the cards in an upside-down stack on the work rug. Say, "Each of you can choose one card and then do what it tells you to do. We'll guess what you're doing." Have them lay their card on the work rug after everyone has guessed. Repeat with the other children. Get the symbol box and say, "Put the symbols on the ones you know." Say, "Let's get some paper slips and copy these phrases down so we can work with them." Copy a phrase from the prepared cards onto the paper and then cut or tear each word from the phrase into a separate paper slip. Say, "Let's see what happens if we try it this way." Switch the order of the verb phrases. For example, instead of 'cut a pizza and eat a slice,' the rearranged phrase would say 'eat a slice and cut a pizza.' Ask, "Can you still do it? Does it still make sense?" Have fun with this. Then, encourage the children to help you repeat the process for the other phrases. Symbolize the handwritten phrases each time they make sense.

Lesson #18: Command Box 4—Two Actions/Two Objects (with pronouns)

Gather several children around a work rug for this game. Place the cards in an upside-down stack on the work rug. Say, "Each of you can choose one card and then do what it tells you to do. We'll guess what you're doing." Have them lay their card on the work rug after everyone has guessed. Get the symbol box and say, "Put the symbols on the ones you know." Say, "Let's get some paper slips and copy these phrases down so we can work with them." Copy a phrase from the prepared cards onto the paper and then cut or tear each word from the phrase into a separate paper slip. Say, "Let's see what happens if we try it this way." Switch the order of the verb phrases. For example, instead of 'bite an apple and lick your lips,' the rearranged phrase would say 'lick your lips and bite an apple.' Ask, "Can you still do it? Does it still make sense?" Have fun with this. Then, encourage the children to help you repeat the process for the other phrases. Symbolize the handwritten phrases each time they make sense.