



Hands-On Learning

Sentence Building with Word Cubes

Primary Concepts®

Build-A-Sentence Cubes are available from Primary Concepts.

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Teaching with Build-A-Sentence Cubes

With Build-A-Sentence Cubes, students explore grammar and usage conventions, develop sentence fluency, and learn to read high-frequency function words. Students build sentences and then create hundreds of variations just by turning the cubes. They change declarative sentences into interrogative sentences, present tense into past, affirmative into negative, and so on. Working with the cubes can be especially useful in identifying and helping students with syntax problems or in working with English-language learners.

Goals:

- Develop sentence fluency
- Develop a better understanding of correct grammatical sentence structure
- Learn to read high-frequency function words

Build-A-Sentence Cubes

Each cube has six related words on its sides. For example, one cube might have six pronouns on its sides: *I, he, she, we, you, they*. Another cube might have six forms of the verb *to be*. Yet another might have adverbs and adjectives. The words are all high-frequency function words that young students encounter often in their reading. The words represent all the parts of speech, including singular and plural nouns, adjectives, articles, verbs of various tenses, helping verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns.

There are six sets of cubes, each set a different color, with nine cubes in each set. Each set has different parts of speech, word elements, and grammar focus. A punctuation cube is included with each set. The sets were designed so each set can be used independently. Since each set of cubes has different sentence structures to investigate, you'll want to make sure that students get a chance to explore all six sets. Combining the six sets provides even more possibilities for exploration.

Word Cube Activities

To set up the learning activities, first sort the word cubes by color and give each student or pair of students a set. Working in pairs has the benefit of allowing students to talk with each other about the sentences. You'll want to encourage the students to read the sentences they build out loud to see whether they sound right and make sense. To maximize the benefits of the word cube activities, observe the students as they work, and correct any grammar or syntax problems as they arise.



English Language Learners

If you have English language learners in your class, you might pair them with fluent English speakers for the activities. English language learners have more difficulty knowing whether a sentence “sounds right,” and the native speaker can help the English learner.

Alternatively, you may wish to work with English language learners one on one or in small groups, tailoring the instruction to their needs. You might build a basic sentence, read it aloud, and have the students repeat the reading as they point to each cube. Then turn a cube to a new side, and have the students read the sentence. Sometimes more than one cube will need to be turned. Example sequence:

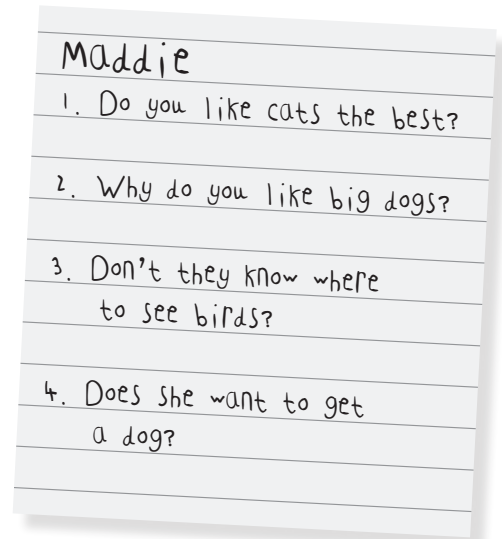
I like birds.
You like birds.
She likes birds.
He likes birds.
We like birds.
They like birds.

Recording

With many of the activities, you may wish to have the students record their sentences on paper. If so, they must capitalize the first word in the sentence and choose the appropriate punctuation for the end of the sentence.

Assessment

If many students are working on an activity at the same time, reviewing their recorded work is a good way to assess each child’s level of understanding and whether they are constructing the sentences correctly. Keep track of their grammar and syntactical errors, and provide review lessons with students as needed.





Word Cube Sets

Yellow

Example:

I see four red apples .

With the yellow set, students explore:

- articles (*a, an, the*)
- singular vs. plural nouns
- verb tenses—present, past, past participle
- number and color words

Orange

Example:

it is very cold today .

With the orange set, students explore:

- verb *to be* (*I am, you are, he is*)
- time words (*then, now, soon*)
- negation (*not, never*)
- conjunctions (*and, but, or*)

Green

Example:

she fell down last year .

With the green set, students explore:

- subject pronouns (*I, she, we, they*)
- verb-preposition combinations (*grow up, sit down*)
- time (*this year, last year*)
- helping verbs (*will, may, might, did*)

Blue

Example:

that girl goes to my school .

With the blue set, students explore:

- possessive adjectives (*my, your, our*)
- verb *to go* (*go, goes, went*)
- prepositional phrases without articles (*to school, at home*)
- helping verbs (*will, can, may*)

Violet

Example:

what do you want to do ?

With the violet set, students explore:

- question words (*who, what, why, when, where*)
- subject-verb agreement (*I like, she likes*)
- verb *to do* (*do, does, did*)
- infinitives (*to do, to go*)

Turquoise

Example:

give it to her !

With the turquoise set, students explore:

- subject pronouns (*I, she, they*)
- object pronouns (*me, us, them*)
- *let* and *let's*
- prepositions (*to, for, of*)



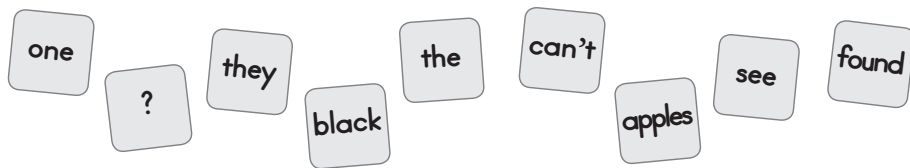
Activity 1: Free Exploration

This is a good activity to introduce the cubes. The students explore all the sides of the cubes and make sentences with the words.

Getting Started

Display a set of cubes, all one color. Since this is the students' first time using the cubes, demonstrate for them how to look at the word on the top of each cube and move them around to make a sentence. Show the punctuation cube and explain that each sentence needs an end punctuation mark— a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point.

Then show the students how to build a sentence. For example, given the yellow cubes below, you might build the sentence *Can't they see the apples?*



On Their Own

Distribute a set of cubes to each child or pair of students and have them read the words on the cubes. Challenge them to build a sentence with the words. They can use the words on any side of the cubes.

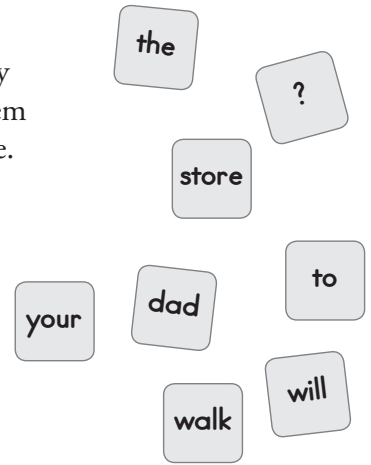


Activity 2: Scrambled Sentences

The words are scrambled. Can students put the words in the right order to make a sentence?

Getting Started

Build a sentence such as the one below made with blue cubes. Mix up the word order of the cubes, being sure not to turn any of the cubes. Show the cubes to the students and challenge them to think of a way to put the words in order to create a sentence.



On Their Own

Give students or pairs of students the sentences shown below, but with the words in mixed order. Have them unscramble the sentences. When they are finished, have them read the sentences out loud.

Extending the Learning

Have the students work with a partner. One composes a sentence, and then scrambles the order. The partner puts the sentence back together.

STARTER SENTENCES

Yellow

You can draw four green balls.
Can you write a book?
He can't eat six green apples.

Orange

Are you better today?
He was not funny.
You must be very cold now!

Green

Did she fall down?
They fly over here every day.
Some day I will ride far away.

Blue

The baby went to sleep.
Can the boy play in her car?
My mom goes to work.

Violet

That big cat likes you!
She wants to buy the other bird.
Where do the dogs like to go?

Turquoise

Shall I sing for you?
I made this for him.
Please give it to them.



Activity 3: Expanding Sentences

With this activity, students expand a simple sentence made up of just two or three words.

Getting Started

Build a short sentence with two or three of the cubes. Then show the students how to expand the sentence using other cubes in the set, without turning any of the cubes in the short sentence. For example, build the sentence *I see books.* from the yellow set. Show the students how you can add the word *blue* to describe the color of the books and the word *many* to describe the number. Work through a few more sentences in a similar way.

I see books.	→	I see many blue books. (Yellow)
It is hot.	→	It is very hot today. (Orange)
She fell.	→	She fell down last year. (Green)
Come home.	→	The boy will come to our home. (Blue)
We know.	→	We don't know that big dog. (Violet)
They sing.	→	They will sing it for you. (Turquoise)



On Their Own

Give the students starter sentences like those listed below, and have them expand the sentences. When they have completed a sentence, have them read it out loud. What does it add to the original sentence? Does it change the meaning?

STARTER SENTENCES

Yellow

We found balls.
They have books.
She can draw.

Orange

He is funny.
Be good.
It was pretty.

Green

It flew.
I ride.
We sit.

Blue

Help her.
Go to sleep.
Walk to school.

Violet

She likes birds.
I know.
Dogs like you.

Turquoise

I read.
Please make it.
Show it.



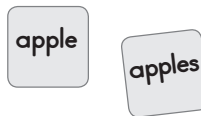
Activity 4: Turn-A-Cube

With this activity, students decide whether sentences have correct syntax.

Getting Started

Build a sentence and read it out loud. Then turn one of the sentence's cubes to a different side. Ask the students to read the new sentence. Does the sentence sound correct? Does anything need to change for the new sentence to make sense? Have the students make any changes needed. In the first example below, if the word *apple* is changed to *apples*, the article *an* must also change. In the second example, if the word *I* is changed to *you*, then the word *am* must be changed to *are*. Sometimes no change is needed.

I see an apple. → I see an **apples**. → I see **the apples**. (Yellow)
I am cold. → **You** am cold. → **You are** cold. (Orange)



On Their Own

Give each child or pair of students a starter sentence like those shown below. Have them turn one cube and read the new sentence. If there is something incorrect about the new sentence, they should try to fix it by turning other cubes.

STARTER SENTENCES

Yellow

I can see a book.
She saw three balls.
He has five books.

Orange

They are old.
It was funny.
I will be good.

Green

I sat down.
I will ride away.
She will fly far.

Blue

That girl goes to my school.
The baby can walk.
The boy will come to my house.

Violet

She wants to buy a bird.
They know that dog.
When do you want to go?

Turquoise

I gave it to them.
She asked me about that.
I will make one for you.



Activity 5: Sentence Fragments

Students turn sentence fragments into complete sentences.

Getting Started

Compose sentence fragments with the cubes. Read each fragment out loud and have the students tell what they could add to make it be a complete sentence. For example, put together the sentence below from the yellow set. Notice that the sentence does not have a subject. Now challenge the students to find ways to change the fragment into a sentence using the other cubes in the set, and ending with the punctuation cube.

can eat the red apple (no subject) → I can eat the red apple. (Yellow)

Repeat the demonstration with another example from the orange set.

we too hot today (no verb) → We **are** too hot today. (Orange)



On Their Own

Give students sentence fragments like those below and challenge them to fix the sentences by adding cubes from the set.

STARTER SENTENCES

Yellow

they can books
found three balls

Green

will run this year
she won't far

Violet

likes the cats
he didn't that dog

Orange

is very fast
I cold today

Blue

that girl to my school
the went to bed

Turquoise

please it to them
let's sing him



Activity 6: Questions?

In this activity, students change declarative sentences into interrogative sentences.

Getting Started

Build declarative sentences like those below and show the children how to change the sentences you built to questions. In some cases, you will change the order of the cubes. In others you will add helping verbs. Sometimes the tense of the original verb needs to be changed.

He was good. → **Was he** good? (Orange)
She fell down. → **Did she fall** down? (Green)
She likes cats the best. → **Does she like** cats the best? (Violet)



On Their Own

Give students starter sentences like those below and have them change them to questions. Often, there is more than one way to create a question.

Extending the Learning

Students can work in pairs with a set of cubes, one student creating a question and the other coming up with an answer.

Can you see the ball? → I see the ball. (Yellow)
Do you like cats? → I like cats. (Violet)

STARTER SENTENCES

Yellow

We can eat.
They have found the ball.

Orange

He was funny.
It is hot today.

Green

We will ride far away.
They flew here last year.

Blue

The baby will sleep.
Mom can't go to the store.

Violet

She wants to get a dog.
They know where to go.

Turquoise

She will read to them.
They can give this to him.



Activity 7: Make It Negative

Students change sentences to negative form by adding a word in the appropriate place.

Getting Started

Start by having the children search through the cubes to find the negative words: *not, never, don't, didn't, won't, and can't*. Tell the children they will be using these words to change positive into negative sentences.

Now build sentences like those below and show the children how to change the sentences to a negative form by adding or turning a cube. Sometimes other cubes need adjustments as well.

I eat apples.	→	I can't eat apples. (Yellow)
We are cold.	→	We are not cold. (Orange)
I fell down.	→	I didn't fall down. (Green)
Dad will go.	→	Dad won't go. (Blue)
I like cats.	→	I don't like cats. (Violet)



On Their Own

Give students starter sentences and challenge them to make them negative. Use the orange, green, blue, and violet cubes for this activity.

STARTER SENTENCES

Orange

It is warm.
We are cold.

Green

She might run away.
I grew up.

Blue

The baby went to bed.
The girl can play at my house.

Violet

We know where to buy a bird.
He likes small birds.



Activity 8: Fix It

Students fix sentences that have errors in grammar and syntax.

Getting Started

Create sentences like those below in which there are one or two errors in grammar or syntax. Have the students read each sentence out loud. Does it sound correct? Often there are several different ways that a sentence can be fixed. Work with the children to correct the errors by turning a cube.

I found a books.	→	I found the books./I found a book . (Yellow)
You is right.	→	You are right./ He is right. (Orange)
Did you fall down.	→	Did you fall down? (Green)
The car won't goes.	→	The car won't go . (Blue)
I likes dogs.	→	I like dogs./ He likes dogs. (Violet)
I read to me.	→	I read to her . (Turquoise)



On Their Own

Build starter sentences like those below and challenge the students to find and correct the errors.

STARTER SENTENCES

Yellow

She eat a apple.
He have many book.
They has a green balls.

Orange

He be funny?
Are it hot today.
They was very fast.

Green

It grow each day.
She didn't ran far.
She ride every year.

Blue

They done want to go.
Mom will goes to the store.
Can the girl walk to school.

Violet

She wants to get bird.
Do she want to get a birds?
We did knew where to see big cat.

Turquoise

Shall me read to you.
Let's asked them to sing.
He say thank you to them.

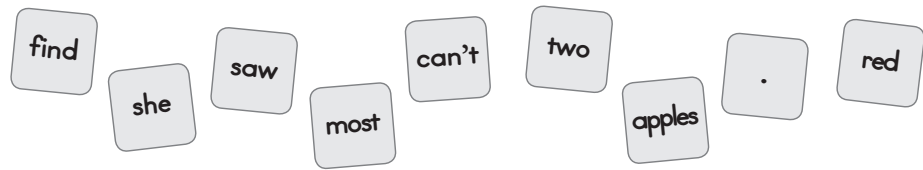


Activity 9: Sentence Roll

With a roll of the cubes, the students challenge each other to see who can build the longest sentence.

Getting Started

Show the children how to play this game. Start by rolling a set of cubes onto the table where all the players can see them. Work with the children to find and record the longest sentence that can be made with the words on the tops of the cubes.



On Their Own

Have the children play the game. Each child or pair should have a set of cubes. Players roll the cubes in their set and build the longest sentence they can make with the words.





Activity 10: Rainbow Sentences

Combining all of the sets of cubes, the students build colorful sentences.

Getting Started

Mix all of the sets of cubes on the table. Tell the children that today they will be building sentences with many colors. Talk the children through your thinking process as you begin to build a sentence, and then make it longer and longer.

Example:

We like books.

We like to read books.

We like to read books after school.



On Their Own

Now give the children a turn. They can use any color cubes in their sentences, but their final sentence must contain at least one cube of each color. Have the children share their sentences when they are finished.

the boy said he wants to buy two little yellow

birds at the store this year .

Cube Word List

Yellow	I he she we you they	had have has could can can't	wrote find found draw drew	see saw seen eat ate eaten	apple apples book books ball balls	a an many the more most	blue green yellow red white black	one two three four five six
Orange	I he we it you they	is am be are was were	can may would could must will	then soon today now once again	so just too very never not	better good funny hot right old	new pretty cold little fast warm	as or if and but after
Green	I she it you we they	sit sat ride rode fly flew	fall fell grow grew run ran	did didn't will won't might may	up away out down over back	way year day time place thing	this some next last each every	first well much for here here there
Blue	baby girl boy mom dad man	went come came go goes walk	will won't can can't may might	help work sleep look live play	car bed home house store school	a any the own that which	on at in to into by	my his her our our their your
Violet	dog dogs cat cats bird birds	to buy to see to do to get to be to go	like likes want wants know knew	do don't did didn't does done	who what when where how why	a the these those that this	same best other all small big	I he she you we they
Turquoise	I he she we you they	you him her me us them	shall can let let's will must	say said make made ask asked	read please take show sing thank	got give gave get call tell	it some one them this that	to of for with from about



Explore grammar and usage conventions with our colorful word cubes. Each color-coded set of cubes explores a different sentence structure. Step-by-step lesson plans show you how to get the most out of your Build-A-Sentence Cubes.

To see our complete line of language arts resources, visit us online at www.primaryconcepts.com

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