

Adjective Plus Noun: Building Expanded Noun Phrases in Year 2 Writing

A simple guide to helping your child in Year 2 (children aged 6-7) use descriptive words to make their writing more interesting, a skill known as creating expanded noun phrases.

What are expanded noun phrases?

In Year 2, children learn about 'expanded noun phrases'. This sounds like a complicated term, but it is actually very simple. A noun is a naming word for a person, place, or thing (like 'dog' or 'park'). An expanded noun phrase is when we add adjectives—describing words—to that noun to give the reader more detail. Instead of just saying 'the dog', your child might write 'the fluffy, brown dog'. They might also add a short phrase to say where the object is, such as 'the fluffy, brown dog in the garden'. This helps the reader picture exactly what is happening in the story.

What happens in the classroom?

During the autumn term, teachers introduce these phrases to help children move from writing simple sentences to more descriptive ones. Your child will likely practise spotting these phrases in books they read and then try building their own. They start with a basic noun and slowly grow the phrase step by step. For example, they might start with 'the cat', then add a colour ('the black cat'), then a feeling ('the grumpy, black cat'), and finally a location ('the grumpy, black cat on the mat'). This gradual process helps them understand how to add detail without feeling overwhelmed.

What this means for your child

Learning to expand noun phrases is part of the National Curriculum (the official plan for what children should learn in English schools). It is a key building block for their writing development. By mastering this, your child can make their stories more vivid and their descriptions more precise. Because every child progresses at their own pace, some may find this easy while others, including children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or those learning English as an additional language, may need more time or different tools to practise. If you have questions about your child's specific progress, your child's teacher is the best person to ask.

Fun ways to help at home

You do not need formal lessons or drilling to help your child. Instead, try turning it into a game during your everyday routine. While walking to school or shopping, play 'I Spy' but with a twist: use two describing words. For example, 'I spy with my little eye, a shiny, red car'. You could also look at a picture in a favourite book and ask, 'How can we make this noun more exciting?' Start with a simple word like 'tree' and see if they can add a colour or a size. Keep it short, playful, and pressure-free.

Common questions

Parents often ask if there is a 'right' number of adjectives to use. While the goal is to add detail, the most important thing is that the sentence still makes sense. Some parents also wonder if they should correct every simple sentence their child writes. It is usually better to encourage them by asking, 'Can you add a

describing word here to help me see it in my head?' This keeps writing a positive experience. If you are unsure about the specific terminology your school uses, a quick chat with the class teacher can help you stay aligned with what is happening in class.

Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: English programmes of study