

Group Speech Therapy: Fast & Easy Ways to Target Multiple Goals

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One of the main things that school SLPs struggle with is being effective in group speech therapy sessions. We've all been there. How are we supposed to keep up with everyone's goals, make sure the students are engaged, and take all the data at the same time?

I think the difficulties of group speech therapy come down to those three main things:

1. It's hard to juggle multiple activities
2. It's hard to take data on multiple students
3. It's hard to accurately target multiple goals

Unless you are doing stations at each session, this isn't easy. As much as I love stations, it isn't always feasible when working with younger students who don't have a lot of autonomy. SO, what if you could take one activity and manipulate it to target multiple goals?

That's what we're chatting about today. Here are my best tips for how to target multiple goals using one activity in group speech therapy.

(Note: This post contains affiliate links.)

Find an activity that is motivating for your group

First, find an activity that you'll think will be motivating for your group. Maybe it's a craft or book or a cool toy set. You'll want to think about the age and ability levels of the students in the group as well as what their interests are.

It's also ok to use multiple activities, games, toys, or resources in one session. If you like to let the students choose the activity, make sure to give them choices out of carefully selected items.

Choose one objective from each student that you'll target

Do NOT try to target every objective for every student in one session. No. You'll drive yourself bonkers. Focus on one objective per student per activity. If you can get to more, great! But having one focus can make you more effective at teaching and targeting that specific goal.

Ask yourself probing questions about the activity

Now, let's get down to the nitty gritty. You may have to get creative and think outside the box on how to change up an activity to target the objective. A good place to start is asking yourself these questions:

1. Can I target the objective directly using the activity?

2. Can I manipulate the game or activity to lend itself to the goals I want to target?
3. Do I need to supplement the activity with task cards to better target the goal?
4. Will this let me teach and scaffold the skills that are being targeted?

For example, maybe you want to use the learning resources surprise boxes with your group. You have students targeting articulation, vocabulary, and comparing and contrast.

- Can I target the objective directly? Articulation – no. Vocabulary – yes. Comparing/contrasting – yes.
- Can I manipulate the activity to lend itself to the goal? Articulation – yes, I'll have the student say their word or sentence the amount of times as the number on the boxes. Maybe I'll put tiny articulation cards inside the boxes. Vocabulary – yes, I'll use the items in the box to talk about the categories each belongs in and describe them. Comparing/contrasting – yes, I'll have the student compare and contrast the items in the boxes.
- Do I need to supplement? Articulation – yes, I'll need cards or word lists and visuals. Vocabulary – yes, I'll use the EET to help with describing. Compare/contrast – yes, I'll use the EET to help with comparing/contrasting.
- Will this let me teach and scaffold the skills being targeted? Yes, this activity is flexible enough that I can stop and teach the skills they need for each goal. When you do this enough, it'll become second nature to you. Because I've done it SO much, I can take a book, toy, or craft and use it for most of my groups that day. Oftentimes I'll pull things out to supplement the activity for a specific student as well. This method overall really makes planning a snap!

Focus on the objectives, not the game

During the activity, sometimes it's easy to take the focus off of the main goal and just play the game or use the activity as it's intended. You definitely want the kids to stay motivated and have fun, but make sure to keep your focus.

You want your students to improve their speech and language skills, so make sure that they know that's the reason why they are with you. Plus, it'll be easier on you to take data if you are focusing on the objective.

Pro tip: You do not have to take data the entire session. Take the beginning or end of the activity and grab that data, then move on to teaching the skill!

Try it out! It's ok if it flops

Not all activities will work perfectly for every group and every goal. Trial and error is ok! Don't be scared to try something out. The more you practice, the easier it'll get.

My favorite multiple goal activities

When choosing resources, you want to choose resources that are fun AND lend themselves to multiple goals. Here are a few of my favorites:

- Books with book companions
- Themed mini units
- Crafts
- Task cards when I need to supplement

I hope these tips help you crush those group speech therapy sessions! What's your favorite way to target multiple goals?

Fluency Therapy in Mixed Groups

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Because of the nature of the crazy schedule of the school-based SLP, I frequently end up having to do fluency therapy in mixed groups. I see them alongside my articulation and language students, which sometimes makes it a little harder to provide top-notch fluency therapy (at least in my mind) for my student.

The most common difficulties I've encountered with dealing with fluency therapy in mixed groups are: not getting quality time to focus on education and counseling and trying to find activities that can work for all of my students.

After lots of trial and error, I've figured out several tips for working on fluency in mixed groups.

1. Plan whole group fluency activities that benefit all speech kids

Instead of trying to make your fluency kids fit into your articulation activities, try the other way around. Start your session off with whole group relaxation exercises. It's beneficial for all, especially your little hyperactive friends. Articulation, fluency, and even voice students alike can all learn about their speech mechanisms. It's a great way to work on the education component, even if it's more in depth than you might usually go with your average artic kid.

2. Open-ended games or activities

Using one unifying activity can make group therapy run more smoothly. You just need to be able to adapt the activity to suit any goal. My go-tos are:

- Themed TPT games
- Picture books or wordless books
- Ball poppers, bowling, bean bag toss
- Any other turn-taking games – strategy practice on their turn (Tip: choose one strategy to practice and review it before beginning game. Sometimes I use artic cards or question sticks for targets)

3. Stations

Setting up stations can be a good way to get one-on-one time with the student to work on that counseling or education piece, since you may get a better response without their peers sitting next to them. The difficult part though is finding stations that are conducive to fluency therapy in addition to goals the other students are practicing.

TIPS:

- Give fluency kids a pacing strip and sentences to practice reduced rate or pausing while doing the activities at each station
- Choose one strategy have them define it and practice it with conversation starters
- Give them a diagram of the speech machine and have them label each part while they complete the station activities

4. Binders/Worksheets

One of my favorite ways to target multiple types of goals is by doing interactive binders or worksheets. I have binders for both articulation and fluency.

Each student keeps a folder with their worksheets in it. I strategically choose the activity sheet from the binders with the sounds or goals they will work on that day. I love this because they can all focus on their specific goals while doing their worksheet. While I work with one on completing it, the others can be coloring, cutting, or pasting as needed.

5. Task Cards

I absolutely love task cards for mixed groups! We pull out different decks for articulation, fluency, and language and they work on the cards for their goal. You can use these with stations, with a game, or just sitting around the table. The ones I use come with lots of activities for each skill, and the kids have a lot of fun with the cards themselves.

Other Notes:

- Another way to approach groups is to do multiple activities each session. Give your students a visual schedule for speech and have them complete several tasks throughout your session: an articulation task, a language task, and a fluency task. This is not my preferred way to structure my sessions, but I have done it when circumstances call for it.
- If all else fails, change their minutes. Sometimes no matter what you do, the group therapy just never ends up working for the student. In these cases, you should probably suck it up and try a different approach. I've seen success with speedy speech type models, where you would see the fluency student 5-10 minutes individually 3-5 days a week. This gives you lots more individual time to focus on their needs.

Group Speech Therapy Activities (That Even Work When Everyone's Working on Different Things)

There are many benefits to group speech therapy and we'll be talking more about that in next week's podcast episode. But what do you do when you end up with a group of kids who are all working on different things? It can still be very beneficial to have them working side-by-side and supporting each other, but it can be hard when they all need to focus on something different.

Today I'll show you some tips that will help you do group speech therapy with a group of children that all have diverse needs and who are working on different skills.

The Four Approaches to Effective Group Speech Therapy:

In my experience, there are 4 main models that work well for doing group therapy:

- Lesson and Practice Approach
- Stations Approach
- One Activity, Multiple Skills Approach
- The Un-Group Approach

Let's look at how each of these models work and which are best for groups of students with diverse needs.

Group Speech Therapy Approach 1:

Lesson and Practice Approach

This approach is good for social skills, language skills, fluency, and voice. In this model, you'll present a new (or old) skill in a lesson where you discuss and the children listen. You will include demonstrations and then have children pair off and practice (role play or ask each other questions). For data collection, you will go between pairs and take data during their practice.

This approach is best used when the children are all working on the same skill or at least on very similar skills. For example, one child may be working on topic maintenance while the other student is working on asking questions to maintain a conversation. They're both working on perpetuating a conversation so the demonstrations and practice are going to be very similar.

Conclusion: This model is NOT ideal for groups of children with diverse needs.

Group Speech Therapy Approach 2:

Stations Approach

This approach is good for speech sounds, groups where all are students are doing different things, and for independent workers. Each child has a page of work that they can do independently (word lists, grammar activity, etc.). Each child will work independently at a station for X minutes using their independent work page, then rotate stations (fine motor, gross motor, writing, yoga, SLP stations). The SLP station is where you work one-on-one on the next level of the skill.

The speech therapist will collect data on the first 10-20 reps at the SLP station. If the student is able to do the next level up, the speech therapist will then give them a new sheet with that new skill being the independent work.

Conclusion: This model is GREAT for use in groups of children with diverse needs but the children need to be able to work somewhat independently.

How it Looks:

1. Students walk in and find their folder from a bin or basket. They bring their folder to the table and pull out their independent work pages. These could be lists of words that use the target skill that they can read independently (or identify pictures of), sentences that contain a target sound or language skill (or pictures to describe with sentences), etc. I use a page like this below:
2. The therapist introduces the stations for the day and assigns each child to one station. The SLP station is where the speech therapist sits and there is always one child at that station. Students go to each station and practice their independent work list while completing the activity at their station. When finished, they repeat until the timer goes off.

Station Ideas for Group Speech Therapy Activities:

- Speech Therapist Station: This is where the speech therapist sits. One child will be at this station at all times. The speech therapist will practice the next highest skill with the child

(one step more difficult than what he can do independently), collect data, and determine if the student is ready to have the next highest skill for independent work.

- Fine Motor Station: Student repeats his words/sentences/skills while stacking small blocks as high as possible or assembling a toy that requires fine motor skills. When the structure is completed, the student disassembles and starts again.
 - Gross Motor Station: Various gross motor skills (like standing on one foot, jumping up and down, touching one's toes, etc.) are written on Popsicle sticks and placed in a cup. The student pulls a stick and practices all of his words/sentences/skills while doing that gross motor skill. Once he completes the list, he picks a new stick and starts over.
 - Yoga Station: Pictures of children holding certain yoga poses are glued to cards and placed in a small tub. The student pulls one card and holds that yoga pose while saying his words/sentences/skills. When he finishes, he picks a new yoga pose and starts over.
 - Writing: If the child is able to write, he writes his words/sentences/skills on a dry erase board while saying them out loud. If he is unable to write, various lines and shapes are drawn on paper and placed inside sheet protectors. The child uses a dry-erase marker to trace the lines or shapes while repeating his words/sentences/skills out loud.
 - Sensory Station: The student is given a medium that allows for sensory exploration, such as slime, Gak, Play-Dough, or a tub of rice. The student is asked to squish, squeeze, and run his hands through the sensory medium while saying his words/sentences/skills out loud.
3. When a timer goes off, students rotate to the next station and engage in the next activity while using their same word list.
 4. At the end of the session, students return their pages to their folders and put their folders away. Photo copies of their independent work sheets are sent home as homework until the next session.

Group Speech Therapy Approach 3:

One Activity, Multiple Skills Approach

This approach is good for children who are not yet working independently or for use with books or games. In this approach, everyone does the same activity (book reading or game) and each child waits until it is his turn to answer a question or practice his skill. The speech therapist will ask a different question for each child based on what he's working on. The therapist will take data on one student per session or take data on all students once per month.

Conclusion: This approach is GREAT for students who are all working on different skills, although they won't get in as much practice as in other models (stations or individual therapy).

How to Use Books in Group Speech Therapy Activities:

What Books to Choose?

Use the books that they are working on in class. This saves you time trying to find books and will help them generalize more quickly. Ask teachers for the most recent books.

How to Work on Speech Skills:

- Give each child a note card that has their target sound on it. Instruct them that when they hear a word that starts with their sound, they should raise their card. Help remind them the first few times until they get better at this.
- After you read each page (or each paragraph if it's a longer book), have the student practice any of the words that contained their target sound (or just a few words if there were a lot). If the child is working at the sentence level, have him practice the whole sentence.
- If the child is able to write, have him write the words found on the back of his card while you're working with the language kids.
- If the child is working at the conversational level, have him answer questions about the book using his good sound. If he has an error, help him catch it and fix it in his response.

How to Work on Language Skills:

- If you are working on specific grammar skills, use the same system as the speech skills where the child is listening for their grammatical structure and raises a card when it's heard. After each page, have the child practice the sentences that used that grammatical marker and come up with additional sentences, as well.
- If you are working on answering questions, have the child answer questions about what's going on in the story after each page.
- If the child is working on vocabulary, ask the child to define words in the text or give you synonyms and antonyms for key words.
- If the child is working on following directions, have the student follow directions like "point to the bus after you point to the frog".

Best Group Speech Therapy Activities:

- Play-Dough

- Use cookie cutters to talk about vocabulary or build something and have the child guess what it is.
- Ask questions about what the child is doing.
- Make letters out of Play-Dough and then practice words with that sound.
- Act out and describe scenarios with the Play-Dough to target grammar.
- Practice play skills and interaction skills while working together with Play-Dough
- Ask the child to follow directions with the Play-Dough.
- **Puzzles**
 - Name objects or talk about what the picture may be.
 - Ask questions about the picture on the puzzle.
 - Have the child practice his speech sounds 5x before he gets the next piece.
 - Describe the picture or the pieces with full sentences to target grammar.
 - Have children work together to complete the puzzle.
 - Have children follow directions with the pieces of the puzzle.
- **Game**
 - Label the parts of the game and the actions necessary to complete.
 - Ask questions about the board/game.
 - Have the child practice his speech words so many times before his turn.
 - Have the child describe the rules of the game and game play using good grammar.
 - Talk about how to be a good winner/loser and how to take turns.
 - Give the child directions to follow for set up, tear down, and game play.
- **Marble Works**
 - Talk about the different tracks and marbles, use some describing words.
 - Ask questions about what the ball is doing or how the child is setting up the tracks.

- Have the child practice his speech sound 5x before getting the next track or marble.
- Have the child describe what is happening in full sentences to practice grammar.
- Have the children work together to create something using good social language.
- Have the children follow directions to create something.

Group Speech Therapy Approach 4:

The Un-Group Approach (AKA 5-Minute Therapy Sessions)

This approach is good for...

- Working on speech sounds
- Working on discrete language skills, like teaching a grammatical marker
- Kids with behavior or attention problems
- Kids with a lot of other services
- Your sanity

How do 5-Minute Speech Therapy Sessions Work?

Rewrite your students' IEPs so each child has 2-5 sessions per week of 5 minutes each (individual). In your schedule, make room for 4 or 5 sessions per half-hour block. At the child's time, pull him into the hall right outside his classroom (no travel time) and drill for 5 minutes. Collect data on the first 20-30 reps per session. In a research study, children in this program made 37% faster progress despite having fewer minutes.

Here's how each therapy session will break down:

Minute 1: Run through 20 trials of the target sound in the target context. Don't provide any feedback, just see how the child does and take 20 data collection points.

At first, just start with the sound in isolation. If the child is able to get 80% of isolation, move up to syllables. Keep progressing through the stages until you get 80% in conversation. Once you get to the conversational levels, you'll just sit down for the first minute and have the child tell you about a past event and record correct/incorrect productions of the sound.

If you're working on single words and you don't have enough flashcards of a certain position to get to 20 trials, repeat the deck.