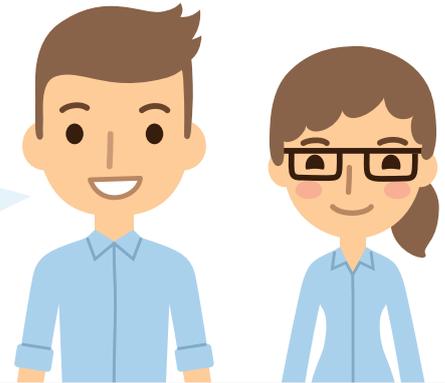


# How children develop speech, language and communication skills

Speech, language and communication skills underpin children's learning. This resource explains what these terms mean and how they are different from each other. It also includes information on the expected development of children in these areas. Having an understanding of this is important in helping identify when children might be having difficulties and need some extra support.



## Speech

### Speech refers to:

- making and saying sounds accurately, i.e. the ability to articulate speech sounds e.g. 'I like this toy' not 'I like this doy'
- putting the right sounds in the right place to create words, e.g. 'hospital' not 'hostipal'
- saying the words clearly in sentences, i.e. the ability to use sounds and words correctly in sentences
- speaking fluently, without hesitating, prolonging or repeating words or sounds
- speaking with expression, with a clear voice, using volume (from quiet to loud), pitch (from low to high), and intonation (the changing rhythm and pattern of pitch), to communicate and support meaning.

Speech skills underpin phonics, which are critical for pupils to know, understand and use when learning to

read. Understanding what 'speech' means is therefore fundamental to your teaching and particularly your teaching of literacy. It is also important to remember speech difficulties are common in younger pupils.

Speech also refers to processing and manipulating the sounds and words you hear so you fully understand what is being said. You may know this as *phonological awareness*. Phonological awareness can include knowledge of: letter/sound correspondence, blending sounds, breaking down words into syllables or sounds, or rhyming properties of words or sounds, i.e. the ability to identify similarities and differences in how different words sound.

Speech and phonological awareness are therefore vital foundation skills in learning to read, spell and write. Ensuring that any concerns over a pupil's speech development are addressed will be vital for their development of literacy.

## Speech: What might we expect at different ages?

### By the age of three

90% of children will have acquired the sounds **m, b, p, h,** and **w**, as well as the **vowels**

### By the age of four

90% of children will have acquired the sounds **k, g, t, d, n, f** and **ng**

### By the age of five

90% of children will have acquired the sounds **s, z, l, v, y, th, sh** and **ch**

### By the age of six

90% of children will have acquired the sounds **r** and **j**

## Speech: What might we expect in school?

On entry into school during the **Reception year**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to:

- make most speech sounds apart from l, r & j (as in lion, run or jam) and th, ch & sh (as in thumb, cheese or shoe); or clusters of two consonants at the beginning of words e.g. bl and st (as in black or step).

On entry into **Key Stage 1**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to use clear speech although they might still make a few mistakes with:

- r, l, & th sounds
- words with lots of syllables
- words with consonant sounds together (like 'scribble' or 'strong').

On entry into **Key Stage 2**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to use all speech sounds clearly.

It will be very useful for you to become familiar with this pattern of typical development to help you spot pupils who are struggling in their speech development and who may also be struggling to make progress in literacy.



# Language

## Language refers to both talking and understanding

Language is all about rules. In our day to day communication these rules give us the framework for talking and understanding. Attention and listening skills are the foundation for language development. Language includes many elements:

- how words are **made, added to, or changed**, e.g. cat/cats; push/pushed; go/went (this is sometimes called **morphology**)
- what these words mean (**vocabulary or semantics**)
- how words are **joined together** in the right order to make sentences, tell stories, create narratives and have conversations (which includes **syntax, narrative** and **discourse**).

**Language isn't just verbal – using signs, symbols and gestures is also using language – you don't have to be able to speak to have good language skills.**



## Language: What might we expect at different ages?

### By 18 months

Babies will be able to say around 20 words, understand some simple words and short phrases and point to familiar objects when you ask them.

### By 2 years

Toddlers will usually use 50 or more single words, start to put two to three word sentences together, ask simple questions and understand between 200 and 500 words.

### By 3 years

Children will usually use up to 300 words of different types, refer to something from the past, put 4 or 5 word sentences together, ask lots of questions and understand simple 'who?', 'what?' and 'where?' questions.

### By 4 years

Children understand and say lots of words now, ask lots of questions including 'why?', use longer sentences and link them together, describe events that have already happened and answer 'why?' questions.

Although a great deal of language development takes place before a child starts school, it is important to remember that language skills continue to develop through both a pupil's primary and secondary years.

**Remember, generally speaking... 'if children don't say it, they don't write it'.**

**In terms of literacy, it is universally acknowledged "that successful development of literacy depends upon competent language skills" (Palmer, 2004 cited in I CAN Talk 1, 2006) and that "language and phonological skills are the foundations of literacy development" (Snowling & Hulme, 2012).**



## Language Development in School

On entry into **Key Stage 1**, some errors with grammar may persist but, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to:

- listen to and understand classroom instructions whilst busy with another task, describe what a simple word means, re-tell favourite stories, and give extra information about something that is not visible
- use well formed and longer sentences and sentences with more detail, join sentences using conjunctions, e.g. 'if' or 'because', use pronouns appropriately and understand concepts such as 'first', 'last' and 'maybe'.

On entry into **Key Stage 2**, typically, we

would expect pupils to be able to:

- be selective about what they need to listen to, ask for clarification if the message is not clear, understand how words link by meaning as well as how they sound, and use new vocabulary in a specific and appropriate way
- ask lots of 'how?' and 'why?' questions, use a range of descriptive words, use more complicated grammar and different ways to join phrases, describe their own experiences in detail and tell a story with the important components – in the right order.

On entry into **Key Stage 3**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to:

- follow complex directions, understand common simple sayings in

context, and understand some words have multiple meanings

- use a range of joining words in speech and writing, and tell interesting, entertaining and original stories with an average length of sentences of 7 to 11+ words.

On entry into **Key Stage 4**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to:

- understand instructions which don't follow the word order of the sentence, understand less obvious sayings
- use 'academic words' when prompted, confidently explain the meaning of subject words and words with multiple meanings, give clear and detailed explanations of rules and use on average longer spoken sentences.

## Communication

### Communication refers to how we interact with others

Communication skills are at the heart of social interaction, participation, building relationships, making friends, and making sense of the human world around you. They are key to how children and young people are able to interact with and learn from others, both in the home as well as in the school environment.

Communication refers to how we interact with others and is sometimes referred to as pragmatics.

Communication skills can include:

- being able to use and demonstrate good listening and attention
- looking at people when in a conversation
- knowing how to talk to others and take turns
- knowing how to change your language to suit the situation or the person you are speaking to
- the ability to understand and take into account other people's points of view or perspectives, their intentions and the wider context beyond the here and now
- understanding about proximity and personal space
- using and 'reading' facial expressions, body language, volume, tone of voice and gesture, keeping to the topic of the conversation yet recognising when others are bored, knowing how to 'repair' a conversation if it goes off track and knowing how to end one appropriately.

### Communication: What might we expect at different ages?

#### By 2 years

Toddlers can focus on an activity of their choice but find it difficult to be directed by an adult. They can follow adult body language including pointing, gesture and facial expressions.

#### By 3 years

Children can begin to listen and to talk with interest but are easily distracted. They can hold a conversation but jump from topic to topic and they show interest in others' play and will join in.

#### By 4 years

Children understand turn-taking as well as sharing with adults and peers, and can initiate conversations.



### Find out more

The Communication Trust's *Universally Speaking* resources give more details about the expected pattern of development of children for age groups: birth to 5, 5 to 11 and 11 to 18: [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-practitioners/universally-speaking.aspx](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-practitioners/universally-speaking.aspx)

## Communication development in school

On entry into **Key Stage 1**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to:

- confidently start and take part in individual and group conversations, join in and organise co-operative role play with friends, and pretend to be someone else talking
- know to look at who's talking and think about what they are saying; to use language to ask, negotiate or discuss ideas and feelings; use mostly relevant information and to specifically seek clarification when needed.

On entry into **Key Stage 2**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to:

- talk about the rules of communication; have a better ability to repair conversation breakdown; and be less literal in their interpretation
- stick to a topic but happily change if prompted; copy others' language and begin to be aware of what terms or phrases their peers are using; and to use and experiment with different styles of talking with different people.

On entry into **Key Stage 3**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to:

- change the style or politeness of their language to suit the situation and the person they are talking to, e.g. a friend in the street or their headteacher

in the corridor; be aware when someone doesn't understand and try another way to get the message across; negotiate with friends and others to resolve issues; and understand jokes based on double meanings.

On entry into **Key Stage 4**, typically, we would expect pupils to be able to:

- fully understand the difference between the style of talk and words used with friends and that to be used in the classroom; use sarcasm as a way to interact with peers and familiar adults; keep a topic of conversation going with a person who finds that skill difficult; and understand and use slang terms with peers and keep up with current slang.



## High expectations

It is important to bear in mind, when thinking about speech, language and communication, that the above developmental outlines are guidelines, and some children will have different rates of development over time. Also, just because a pupil has not yet reached a particular milestone does not mean that they will not, nor that they will not have strengths in other areas. It is important for effective inclusion that teachers a) have high expectations for all children and b) avoid the idea that a child's ability is fixed and cannot change. What is key is to respond to the individual needs of children and support them when they are having difficulties. Having a good understanding of typical development is a tool to allow you to think about when children might be having difficulties as well as what strategies you might adopt to support them in the classroom.

## Learning to, and being able to, read and write is dependent on the following speech, language and communication skills:

### Vocabulary and Grammar

A broad vocabulary and good knowledge of sentence structure/ grammar is vital for reading comprehension and for decoding and predicting what words say; predicting the right type of word for a sentence to make sense and then selecting the appropriate word; and understanding what a particular word means.

### Narrative

Pupils need to hear stories to understand how they are structured and organised. Knowing how to tell stories and have conversations supports them in making sense of what they read so that they can read for meaning.

### Social understanding

Pupils who appreciate the unwritten rules of conversations and social situations can apply this to both the understanding of the stories they read, as well as the stories and narratives they write.

### Attention and Listening

Sustained attention: the ability to attend, focus and concentrate on a single task is important as the demands of literacy increase.

### Phonological Skills - Decoding and Encoding

The same speech processing system underpins the phonological skills needed for both spoken and written language. This means that being able to process speech sounds (phonics and phonological awareness) is essential in accessing accepted methods of learning to read and spell. Phonological awareness can include knowledge of: letter or sound correspondence, blending sounds, breaking down words into syllables or sounds, or rhyming properties of words or sounds, i.e. the ability to identify similarities and differences in how different words sound.

## What about literacy?



Literacy includes reading, writing and spoken language. For the purposes of this information sheet we are considering the following technical aspects of literacy:

- decoding, reading and understanding individual words
- reading and understanding sentences
- encoding and writing words, i.e. spelling
- writing meaningful phrases, sentences and narratives

Pupils bring a range of their experiences, skills, strategies and knowledge to the formal process of acquiring the literacy skills above.

### Oral Language and Literacy

Learning to read builds upon oral language skills; language and phonological skills are the foundations of literacy development. It is therefore vitally important to foster the development of oral language skills as a precursor to subsequent literacy and academic achievement.

The data supports this key principle, (Snowling et al, 2011):

- Pupils who attain below the nationally expected level in reading at the end of Key Stage 1 are typically characterized by delayed development of Communication, Language and Literacy on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
- Children with good Early Years Foundation Stage scores on Communication, Language and Literacy are highest achieving at Key Stage 1 and in year 3, in both literacy and mathematics, confirming the link between good language skills as a foundation for later achievement in school
- In their report on English in 2012 Ofsted stated:

*'Speech comes before both reading and writing. The earlier that all children develop confidence in their speech, along with an extensive vocabulary, the more likely it is that they will be able to improve their overall competence in reading and writing.'*

If a pupil demonstrates specific problems in their attention and listening, phonological skills, vocabulary, grammar, narrative, or social understanding, i.e. has Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), then it is highly likely that this will have a detrimental impact on their development of literacy and in their attainments.