

# Oral Language and Communication Progressions

By age 5

## STRATEGIES

**1. Teach children how to listen** – encourage them to identify and demonstrate good listening skills in themselves.

**2. Use good practice strategies to teach new vocabulary** – link new words to those children already know. Ask the children if they have heard of the word before, help them fill in gaps of understanding and play around with how the word looks and feels.

**3. Give explicit structures for supporting narrative skills** – stories with: who, where, when, what happened and an ending. Encourage an ethos of asking for clarification, saying when they don't understand and what they're struggling with.

**4. Front load building knowledge and vocab.**  
Give plenty of time for children to think and respond to questions.

## Attention, listening and understanding

Understand they need to look at who's talking to them and think about what they're saying

Listen to and understand instructions about what they're doing, whilst busy with another task

Understand longer 2 to 3 part spoken instructions, e.g. "Get your shoes, then choose a partner and line up by the door"

Understand 'how' or 'why' questions, e.g. "How did the family escape from the bear in the story?"

## Vocabulary

Understand that words can be put into groups or categories, and give examples from each category

Understand a range of words to describe the idea of time, shape, texture, size and know in which context to use them

Name objects, characters, and animals from a description, e.g. "It lives in the jungle and is fierce with big teeth and is stripy." Children at this age will ask if they are unsure

Use words more specifically to make their meaning clear, e.g. "I didn't want my yellow shorts; I wanted the blue ones that match my sunhat"

## Speech Sounds

Produce speech that is clear and easy to understand, though may still have some immaturities

Develop good knowledge and understanding of sounds and words, which are important for reading and spelling

Break words up into syllables, e.g. "Fri-day" – 2 syllables, "Sat-ur-day" – 3 syllables

Recognise words that rhyme or sound similar, e.g. "Cat and hat – they rhyme", "Bananas and pyjamas", "Wonky Donkey" – they sound similar"

Work out what sound comes at the beginning of a word, e.g. "Sit begins with 's'. Sun, silly, Sam and sausage all begin with 's'."

## Sentence building and grammar

Use well-formed sentences, longer sentences and sentences with more details, e.g. "I made a big round pizza with tomato, cheese and ham on top"

Use some irregular past tense words, e.g. "I drank all my milk", "She took my teddy"

Join phrases with words such as 'if', 'because', 'so', 'could', e.g. "I can have a biscuit if I eat all my dinner"

Ask and answer 'what', 'where', 'when', and 'what could we do next' questions

Show that they can use language to reason and persuade, e.g. "Can I go outside because it's stopped raining?"

## Storytelling and narrative

List events with some detail, e.g. "We went to the beach and I made the biggest sandcastle ever and we had fish and chips on the grass"

Re-tell favourite stories - some parts as exact repetition and some in their own words, e.g. "...going on a bear hunt, going to catch a big one, we're not scared...and he chased them all the way home"

Begin to add something that's gone wrong in their own stories, e.g. "...but the little boy dropped his big ice cream on the floor, and he was very sad and crying..."

Describe events. These may not always be joined together or in the right order, e.g. "Dad was angry. We was late for the rugby. It was broken. The car tyre"

Use longer and more complicated sentences within their stories, e.g. "When he got home, he saw an enormous crocodile sitting on the couch and the crocodile said good morning, because he was a friendly crocodile"

## Conversations and social interaction

Start conversations with other people and join in with group conversations

Play co-operatively and pretend to be someone else talking. These games can be quite elaborate and detailed

Use language to communicate a wider range of things – such as ask, negotiate, give opinions, and discuss ideas and feelings, e.g. "Can we go to the park after school today – it's sunny and it will be fun"

Give details that they know are important and will influence the listener, e.g. "Ben fell over that stone, Sam didn't push him"

# Oral Language and Communication Progressions

By age 7

## STRATEGIES

1. **Play word games**, e.g. Have children think up different words for the same thing, talk about word opposites, add adjectives to describe an object, or add adverbs to describe an action.

2. **Encourage longer sentences to explain**; have a box full of connectives, e.g. also, then, next, because, however. Use one of them to explain your science experiment.

3. **Give children specific roles for group work**, e.g. encourager, questioner, timekeeper, leader, observer – show them what to do and practice what to say. This will facilitate group working and discussions.

4. **Encourage an ethos of asking for clarification**, saying when they don't understand and what they're struggling with.

## Attention, listening and understanding

Understand the key points they need to focus on to answer a question or follow an instruction and begin to ignore less important information, e.g. "Two buses have nine passengers each, but three trains are empty. How many passengers all together?"

Be aware of when a message is not clear and ask for an explanation, e.g. "Is the author the one that writes the story and the illustrator does the pictures?"

Understands complex 2 to 3 part instructions, e.g. "Choose a character from the story we've just read, then talk to your partner about how they feel at the end of the story"

## Vocabulary

Compare words - the way they look, sound, or mean, e.g. "It's weird, bare and bear sound the same, but you spell them different and they mean different things"

'Guess the word' when provided with clues using shape, size, and function, e.g. "It's a wild animal, grey and quite fat with thick skin, it isn't an elephant, it has a long name and starts with 'h'"

Use newly learnt words in a specific and appropriate way, e.g. "Do you know what symmetry means? If you draw a line down a shape and it's exactly the same on each side of the line, then it's symmetrical"

## Speech Sounds

Use speech that is consistently clear and easy to understand

Show good knowledge and understanding of sounds and words, which are important for reading and spelling, e.g. Can identify beginning and end sounds in words

Spot more complex rhymes, e.g. Happy/snappy

Split up short words into sounds, e.g. D-i-nn-er

Count syllables in words, e.g. Ca-ter-pill-ar

Use sound and letter links to read and spell unfamiliar words

## Sentence building and grammar

Ask lots of questions to find out specific information including 'how' and 'why', e.g. "How do we know dogs can't get out?"

Use an imaginative range of descriptive words in sentences, e.g. "Suddenly, he saw a huge, hairy creature"

Use more complicated grammar including using different ways to join phrases to help explain or justify an event, e.g. "It was scary because even the man with the dog looked worried, so we decided to get out of there"

## Storytelling and narrative

Tell a story with important key components in place – so they set the scene, have a basic story plot and the sequence of events are generally in the right order

Describe their own experiences in detail and in the right order, e.g. About a holiday, weekend activities or visits

Begin to be aware of what the listener knows already and make checks while telling a story, e.g. "You know Mr Jones, he's our caretaker, he always wears a hat, well he wasn't in school today..."

Accurately predict what will happen in a story

## Conversations and social interaction

Take turns to talk, listen, and respond in two way conversations and groups

Use language they hear other people using and begin to be aware of current peer language. They're learning that they need to use different styles of talk with different people. They will use different words when they are talking to friends than when they are talking to a teacher, e.g. Terms like, 'in your face', 'wicked' or 'yeah right'

Exaggerate in an implausible way, to make stories more exciting, e.g. "Last year on my summer holidays I made the biggest sandcastle in the world"

# Oral Language and Communication Progressions

By age 9

## STRATEGIES

**1. Develop concept vocabulary:** have a box of words related to time/measurement/ size/shape – encourage children to choose a word, say what they know about it, how it can be used, e.g. “Octagon is a shape with 8 sides, I remember it because it’s like octopus, 8 legs!”

**2. Children may need time to think before responding to questions and instructions.** Give them time for thinking and processing.

**3. Play inferencing games to build these complex language skills** – “What do I mean when I say... you’ll need a warm coat?”, “How do you know...”

**4. Encourage children to comment on their own sentences** – do they include a connecting word; do they have lots of descriptive words?

## Understanding of spoken language and verbal reasoning

Listen to information, work out which elements are key and make relevant, related comments, e.g. “So, we need to go home and ask people of different ages what telly was like when they were young and work out how things have changed. I can ask my granny, my dad and my big sister”

Identify clearly when they haven’t understood and be specific about what additional information they need, e.g. “So, what do we use to measure liquid again? Is it millimetres or millilitres?”

Infer meanings, reasons and make predictions, e.g. “Now, Room 4, I’m going to count to 10” [Mrs Jones is getting cross, if we don’t stop messing around, someone will be in trouble]

## Vocabulary

Use a range of words related to time and measurement, e.g. “Next Friday we’re going on our school trip. Mrs Malaki says we’ll be about an hour on the coach – that’s not too bad is it mum?”

Use a wide range of verbs to express their thoughts, or explain cause and effect, e.g. “I think that’s a great idea”, or “If you hold the bowl still, I’ll be able to pour the mixture in”

Join in discussions about a visit or activity using topic vocabulary, e.g. “Tutankhamen was about the same age as me when he became a pharaoh. He was buried in the valley of the kings with loads of treasure. Do you believe the mummy’s curse?”



## Sentence building and grammar

Use a whole range of regular and irregular grammatical word endings, with few errors being made, e.g. fought, fell, brought, geese, fish

Use complex grammar and sentences effectively to communicate in different ways to clarify, summarise, explain choices and plan, e.g. “We decided that Jenny would go first because she’s the fastest and would get us a good start. Me and Jack will go in the middle and Mere will go at the end because she does loads of sport and is really fit”

Uses intonation linked to grammar to help make sense of information, e.g. “Helpful?”, she cried, “you must be joking!”

## Storytelling and narrative

Put interest into their voices to make storytelling exciting and come to life

Add detail or leave information out according to how much is already known by the listener

Understand the interests of the listener, e.g. “Guess who I saw yesterday...”

## Conversations and social interaction

Use formal language when appropriate in some familiar situations, e.g. Showing a visitor around school

Keep conversations going with a range of people in different situations, by making relevant comments or by asking questions

Use language for a range of different reasons. This is important for building friendships, e.g. Complimenting or criticising, clarifying, and negotiating

# Oral Language and Communication Progressions

By age 11

## STRATEGIES

**1. Play around with words** – have a range of words with more than one meaning and get children to explain the meaning. Get children to build category maps or word webs for topic vocabulary.

**2. Give children plenty of time to think** before responding to questions and instructions.

**3. Encourage an ethos of asking for clarification**, saying when they haven't understood something, or what they're struggling with.

**4. Encourage children to support each other's thinking** – act like a detective – how do we know this will happen, how do we know this character is good – what evidence can we find?

## Understanding of spoken language and verbal reasoning

Begin to appreciate sarcasm when it's obvious, e.g. "My best vase, broken, now that was really clever"

Understand different question types: Open - "Can you tell me all about your visit to the museum?" Closed - "Did you enjoy your trip to the museum?" Rhetorical - "Wasn't that a lovely trip to the museum?"

Recognise simple idioms, but can't really explain why they're funny or what they mean, e.g. Doing something 'at the drop of a hat'

Follow spoken directions which are quite complex.

Understand factual information, but may still find it difficult to understand information that needs to be inferred

## Vocabulary

Pick up new vocabulary needed for learning specific to topic areas and more generally

Use more objective and clearer definitions of words, as you might find in a dictionary, e.g. definitions such as 'excited' when it's Christmas or their birthday will develop into 'excited' meaning eager or thrilled

Use sophisticated words but meaning might not always be accurate, e.g. "I had to co-operate really hard to get the work done"

Understand that words have more than one meaning and can explain this, e.g. 'lie down' and 'tell a lie'

Use more interesting vocabulary when prompted e.g. 'immense' instead of 'huge'



## Sentence building and grammar

Use sentences of around 7-11 words in their talking, though during conversation and discussion, shorter phrases are often used

Use a range of higher level words for joining sentences in both speech and writing, e.g. before, also, then, so

Use questions to help conversations flow

Explain some rules of grammar and know when a sentence is not grammatically correct

## Storytelling and narrative

Tell elaborate entertaining stories which are full of detailed descriptions

Use everyday language that is detailed and about experiences that may have happened some time ago or are planned for the future

Tell interesting, entertaining, and original stories with a clear plot and often sub-plots

Explain the rules of a game or a sequence of events in a simple but accurate way, e.g. giving directions for how to get somewhere, or giving instructions about how to carry out a task

## Conversations and social interaction

Enjoy jokes based on double meanings though they may not always be able to explain them, e.g. "What do you get when you cross a snowman with a vampire?" Answer: "Frostbite"

Change the style of their language to suit the situation and the listener, e.g. "Hey, how you doing?"; "Bye mum, see you tonight"; "Morning Miss ....."

Be aware when someone doesn't understand and try another way to get information across

Manage and organise collaborative tasks with little adult supervision  
Enjoy organising group games and can explain the rules effectively

Negotiate an agreement explaining other options and possible outcomes

# Oral Language and Communication Progressions

By age 13

## STRATEGIES

### 1. To get the most out of group work

Young people benefit from guidance on how to work in groups. They benefit from teachers showing them how to work and talk together. In addition, giving young people specific roles for group work can support their learning, e.g. encourager, questioner, timekeeper, leader, observer.

### 2. Create an 'asking friendly' classroom

This will encourage young people to ask for clarification. You can give them different ways to do this. Ask them to explain what specifically they don't understand, e.g. "I don't know what estuary means" "Is the estuary where the river meets the sea?" Make deliberate mistakes – do they pick up on your error and question you?

### 3. To encourage clear spoken language

Give a structure to present information verbally (like a writing frame). Use to talk about a sequence of events, rules of a game, descriptions of people, objects or places. Give a clear structure for them to support their thinking and organisation of language, such as who, where, when, what, how, why.

## Understanding of spoken language and verbal reasoning

Understand instructions that don't follow the same order as words in the sentence, e.g. "Before you get your equipment, decide who you're working with and what positions you're playing"

Think about how they might persuade others, what they'll say if other views are different from their own, e.g. "I know you don't go to rugby, but after the match a few of us are going for a pizza"

Infer meaning, working out information that isn't given directly, e.g. "She grabbed her coat and bag and dashed out of the door" [she was in a hurry]

Understand less obvious 'sayings', e.g. "Rome wasn't built in a day, you know"

Understand and explain words and sayings with double meanings

## Vocabulary

Use words in more and different ways, e.g. "bright kid" / "bright day" / "bright idea"

Define more difficult words and give examples, e.g. "Justice is about fairness and honesty, where the right thing happens."

Use spelling rules and patterns in words to get clues to understand meaning, e.g. "Un... reliable – un means not reliable"

Use more difficult words when prompted in formal speaking and writing tasks, e.g. Formal: "James is incredibly arrogant" Friends: "James loves himself, he's a pain"

Confidently explain the meaning of words in different subjects

## Sentence building and grammar

Talk using sentences with an average length of 7-12 words, though during conversation and discussion shorter phrases are usually used

Join spoken and written sentences using more difficult words, e.g. even though, so that, furthermore, nevertheless

Produce well-planned, complex spoken stories with different elements and plenty of detail

Give detailed explanations of rules or break down steps in more complex sequences

## Social interaction

Understand and use slang with peers. Keep up with rapidly changing 'street talk', e.g. "That was sick"

Use sarcasm as a way to interact with peers and familiar adults, e.g. "Cool dance dad!"

Keep a topic of conversation going even though the person they're speaking to finds this skill harder

Fully understand the difference between the words and style of talk used with friends and the different style of talk needed in the classroom

Engage in humorous 'banter' with friends

