

Monitoring progress in spoken language



No Pens Day
Wednesday

Signing up to *No Pens Day Wednesday* is a great way to embed spoken language in to every lesson and all of your teaching. Speaking and listening are essential skills that are the foundation of learning; pupils do better in school when they're encouraged to talk and think together.

However, because communication is so implicit in all that happens in a classroom, it's not always easy to monitor children's progress in this area. How can you tell if your pupils are making gains with their speech, language and communication? It can be tricky, could you tell the difference between where young people should be with their spoken language skills in year 6 compared to year 5, for example?

Checking progress with speech, language and communication takes planning and preparation. It's not like the written word; if you don't capture what your pupils are saying and doing, this information can quickly be lost. When planning how to assess spoken language skills, it is essential to consider their understanding of language as well as what pupils actually say.

You might find it helpful to think about:

- Devising a system where you focus on several children each week; you won't be able to monitor the speech, language and communication skills of all the children in your class at one time
- Developing ways to observe and record skills during speaking, listening and group interaction tasks
- Completing log sheets, allowing you to mark against spoken language objectives for a particular lesson
- Making video or audio recordings of group discussions or paired work
- Asking the pupils themselves to reflect on a piece of speaking and listening work that they've done. Did they feel that they understood what was being said? Did they feel they contributed well? Were they able to get their point across clearly and concisely? Were they aware of others' contributions? Did they all listen to each other? Is there anything they could have done differently or would like to improve?
- Checking any discrepancies between a pupil's speaking and listening skills and their abilities in other areas – do they appear to understand instructions, but struggle to express themselves well verbally and in writing?

Some lessons are easier than others to assess spoken language. Even when speaking and listening aren't the main focus of a lesson, you can still monitor how your pupils are getting on as these skills are part of every lesson:

➤ Include speaking and listening objectives in target setting for individual pupils, so that you know what skills you're looking out for. For one child, a significant gain will be having the confidence to speak within a group, whereas for another a target may be to listen attentively to others during their turn. Older pupils could reflect on where they think their skills are good and where they need to focus more effort. Useful resources to support target setting based on speech, language and communication, can be found here: en.commtap.org

➤ Try to make sure that lesson plans across the curriculum include speaking and listening opportunities and objectives, so that there is always at least one spoken language objective that you can evaluate your pupil's successes against. For example, in science, can your pupils explain the sequence of an experiment? In maths, can they negotiate a problem as part of a small group? Older pupils could use their self knowledge (meta skills) to work out how well they used these skills.

One of the best ways to determine spoken language skills is to break communication down into its component parts – it's difficult to combine all aspects of these complex skills into one category of "spoken language". In the same way as we look at the components of literacy, maths or science, looking at the components of spoken language can support our understanding of what to expect, what to look out for and provide us with the knowledge to scaffold pupils' learning.

The table on the next page has some of the components of spoken language you might want to look out for and record. Have a look at the Universally Speaking booklets for more detail and ideas on how to check this out in the classroom: www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/universallyspeaking

Year group	Talking; vocabulary, sentences and narratives	Understanding of spoken language	Social interaction
Foundation Stage	Refers to something that's happened in the past, uses 4-5 word sentences, asks questions, makes comments relevant to what they have heard	Listens to a simple story, understands and follows simple instructions, understands simple questions	Plays and plans imaginative games with other children, shows awareness of other's feelings, take turns, starts to use talk to work out problems, plan and organise
Key stage 1	Uses new, topic based vocab, asks more complex questions, e.g. starting with 'how', uses more complicated grammar to make longer sentences	Asks for clarification when hasn't understood, understands simple 2-3 part instructions	Enjoys listening and being a part of the conversation, responds to other people in the group, aware of adapting their language based on who they are speaking to
Key stage 2	Able to use language to make predictions, uses topic vocabulary during discussions, uses long, complex sentence structures, tells elaborate stories, makes their speech interesting and engaging	Identifies when hasn't understood and what the extra information is that they need, understands inference and identifies key, relevant pieces of information	Aware of adapting their language based on who they are speaking to, keeps conversations going by making comments or asking questions, enjoys organising groups and explaining group rules
Key stage 3	Picks up new topic vocabulary, uses more interesting vocabulary, uses longer sentences, defines more difficult words, gives detailed explanations of rules or sequences	Follows complex spoken directions, understands common sayings, understands words with double meanings	Sees someone else's point of view, explains the rules of a game, changes the style of language based on the listener, negotiates to resolve conflict
Key stage 4	Sentences are an average length of 9-13 words, uses difficult joining words to make complex sentences	Confidently follows complex directions, asks for help when hasn't understood, understands subtle differences between similar words	Uses language imaginatively for social interaction, maintains the topic of a conversation, takes part in group interaction and knows when it's appropriate to join in

To help identify the speech, language and communication skills expected at different ages, The Communication Trust has developed The Progression Tools and Universally Speaking; two resources

that explain the skills expected at different ages. They also help to identify any children who may be struggling with their speech, language and communication skills.

We recommend that you use these resources to plan more detailed spoken language objectives that can be incorporated in to your lesson plans, whatever the lesson!

More information can be found at: www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/universallyspeaking and www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/progressiontools