

# Speech and Language Strategies for Teachers

*These handouts have been developed in order to help you support your students' speech and language skills.*

In order to choose strategies, it is helpful to have knowledge of communication areas.

**Communication** is a developmental skill. Children develop “adult speech” over a period of years and at different rates.

- The main difference between “speech” and “language”:
  - **Speech** is the way words sound.
  - **Language** involves an individual’s ability to understand words (receptive language) and to produce words (expressive language).

## Pre-communicative skills:

### **Encourage...**

- Eye contact
- Turn-taking
- Motor imitation
- Sound imitation
- Gestures
- Singing
- Finger play

### **Reinforce...**

- Gestures
- Sound or Word approximations

### **Consider...**

- Visual Schedule
- American Sign Language
- Augmentative or Alternative Communication
  - Picture communication system
  - iPad
  - Button devices

# Articulation/Phonology

## Tips/Strategies:

1. With younger children, bring whatever you are talking about closer to your mouth so that the child is more apt to focus on speech production. For example, when talking about a toy dog, talk about the dog while holding it near your mouth.
2. If you cannot understand a student and you have asked him/her to repeat him/herself, it might help to ask the student to show you (i.e., gesture) or say it in a different way. Once you figure out the word, model the correct production of the word and have him/her try to repeat it to you.
3. Model the erred sound by itself then have the student attempt to imitate (e.g., If the student says “nake” for snake, you would say, “Oh, you want the snake.”). Emphasizing on the omitted “s” may also help.
4. Have the student speak slowly and repeat him/herself.

## 10 Activities to assist with articulation/phonology:

1. If you hear a consistent speech sound error, use written text to increase the student’s ability to see, hear, and be aware of that sound. For example, if a student has difficulty with “r,” ask the student to find all of the words containing the “r” sound on a page. Then model appropriate production of the sound and have the student try to imitate.
2. Highlight words in his/her own writing or in classroom worksheets that contain sounds that the student is misarticulating. Model the correct production of these sounds for the student and have him/her try to imitate.
3. During oral reading by the student, have the student underline the target sounds and reinforce the student for correct sound production when they read aloud.
4. If you have a student who is able to produce a sound correctly some of the time but does not self-monitor throughout the day, set up a nonverbal cue with that student to let him/her know that you are listening (e.g., putting your hand on the student’s shoulder before calling on them to read aloud.).
5. Repeat the correct production of the misarticulated words.
  - o Student: “The wabbit.”
  - o Teacher: “O, the rabbit.”
6. Stress words containing student’s target sound during language arts/reading time.
7. See if the student can hear the difference between the way he/she says words and the correct production.
8. Make sure errors are not due to a dialect or accent. For example, “th” is not produced in every language (e.g., Spanish). Therefore, it is considered a speech difference than disorder.
9. Make sure errors are not developmental in nature.
10. Positively reinforce correct pronunciations (e.g., “Great r in rabbit!”).

# Specific Speech Sound Strategies

Many consonant sounds have a pair, or **cognate**. A cognate involves two sounds that are produced in the same way, but one sound involves the voice being on, or “loud,” and the other involves the voice being off, or “soft.” Evoking many sounds will involve using the same technique but one is “soft” and one is “loud.”

(some) Cognates	
Soft	Loud
p	b
k	g
f	v
s	z

## /p/: “The Poof Sound”

- Say the /p/ sound into the student’s hand so that he/she can feel the poof of air.

## /k/: “The Cough Sound”

- Tell the student to put his/her hand on his/her throat, slightly open the mouth, move the tongue to the back of the mouth, then cough.

## /f/: “The Fan Sound”

- Tell the student, “Bite your bottom lip and blow cool air over your bottom lip to cool it.”

## /l/: “The Singing Sound”

- Tell the student, “Lift your tongue up in the front, behind your teeth, and make a sound.”

# LANGUAGE: VOCABULARY

- Use demonstration paired with student interaction/movement, etc. to act out meaning.
- Teach vocabulary in context.
- Use gestures/objects/pictures to emphasize/teach meaning.
- Use synonyms, antonyms, categories to reinforce understanding.
- Use peer instruction/cooperative groups.
- Use a variety of games that target vocabulary.
- Place words and definitions on note cards. Use the cards to play games such as matching or memory.
- Use examples/acting out (actions), pictures, and multiple modalities to teach figurative language and multiple meanings.
- Prior to introducing new units/stories, compile a list of key vocabulary words. Discuss the words and possible meanings with the students.
- When possible, pair a picture with the vocabulary word. When vocabulary is abstract and pictures are not available, try to relate the words to a personal experience for students to relate to.
- Create word lists with vocabulary and definitions to display in a visible place within the classroom setting.
- Provide the student with a vocabulary list including definitions one week prior to beginning a new unit.

## Grammar/Sentence Structure:

- If the student says something incorrectly, repeat it for him/her correctly in a natural way.
  - Student: "I goed to the store."
  - Teacher: "O! You went to the store!?"
- When working with the student individually, with written or oral language, repeat the error and ask the student how the sentence sounds.
  - Student says or writes: "I goed to the store."
  - Teacher: "I goed to the store? Does that sound right?" If the student is unable to correct it, give him/her a choice. For example, "Which sounds better: 'I goed to the store' or 'I went to the store?'" Then have the student produce the correct production.

## Expanding Limited Expressive Language Skills:

- When interacting with a student, repeat what the student says and add a word that is appropriate to the context. For example, while playing with a toy car, the child says, "Car." You could respond with, "Car, go car." If the child uses two-word utterances, expand to three-word utterances, etc.
- Introduce new words or concepts to a child by using the word in a variety of situations as well as by using the word repetitively. For example, when teaching colors: show a blue ball, a blue car, the blue sky, etc. Also, use pictures or objects when available to help reinforce the ideas.

# EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE TIPS/STRATEGIES-

## Receptive Language Tips/Strategies:

- Use a slower rate of speaking when presenting information.
- Present information in smaller chunks.
- Rephrase/paraphrase auditory information.
- Frontload: Before presenting a large amount of auditory information, tell the student what to listen for.
- Check for understanding: Have the student repeat what he/she is listening for.
- Use a graphic organizer or drawing to increase understanding.
- Ask the student a variety of *wh*-type questions.
- Break story information into smaller units and ask questions.
- Review/discuss main idea.
- When giving directions, repeat them again using different words.
- Create a list of common directions that are used throughout the day. When needed, they can be laminated and placed on the board for the entire class, or can be smaller and placed on the student's desk.
- Using gestures when giving directions.

## Activities for Following Directions:

**Adapt to your student's level of development** – he/she will be able to understand and follow more difficult directions as his/her language and memory skills develop.

1. At first, use gestures to demonstrate the meaning of simple directions: Say, "Give it to me," while extending your hand.
2. Then teach your student to follow simple directions without gestures: "Stand up." "Get the ball." "Sit down."
3. Following that, he/she will learn to do one thing with two objects: "Give me the bowl and the spoon."
4. The next step is where you ask him/her to do two things with one object: "Get your shoes and put them in your closet."
5. He/she will then learn to understand a combination of where to go and what to do there: "Go to your room and get your shoes."
6. Then develop his/her memory even further by linking two totally separate directions together: "Put your glass on the table and get your teddy from the toybox."
7. Finally, he/she should understand and follow a series of three unrelated directions involving three actions: "Put your toys away, go wash your hands, and meet me in the kitchen."

## Fluency/Stuttering

Sound prolongation (e.g., Ssssssssoap!) or facial grimacing (e.g., eyebrow scrunching; eyes clenching shut) while speaking or trying to speak is often indicative of a true Fluency Disorder. Here are some strategies that can help with increasing fluent speech:

- Allow the student to complete his/her thoughts without interrupting or completing the sentence for him/her.
- Maintain natural eye contact with the student. Try not to feel embarrassed or anxious as the student will pick up on your feeling and could become more anxious. Wait naturally until the student is finished speaking.
- Use a slow and relaxed rate with your own speech, but not so slow that you sound unnatural. Using pauses in your speech is an effective way to slow down your speech rate as well as the student's.
- Give the student your full attention when they are speaking so that they know you are listening to what they have to say. It is helpful that the student does not feel that he/she need to fight for your attention. With younger children, it is also helpful to get down to their eye level and maintain good eye contact.
- After a student completes a conversational turn, it would be helpful for you to rephrase what he/she said in a fluent manner. This can be helpful as the student realizes you understand what they said, but also provides a fluent model for them.
- Try to call on the student in class when you feel that he/she will be successful with the answer (when the student raises his/her hand) versus putting the student on the spot when they have not volunteered information. In addition, new material or complex information may cause the student to feel more stress and thus, increase dysfluencies.

# Voice

If you have a student whose vocal quality is consistently poor (e.g., hoarse, breathy, rough, or they have no voice) or their vocal quality gets progressively worse as the day goes on, a referral to the School Nurse may be deemed appropriate.

## Healthy vocal hygiene suggestions:

- Allow him/her to have a bottle of water at his/her desk to drink throughout the day. If necessary, use a visual aid for the student to track intake; a reward may be necessary.
- Discuss healthy ways for students to use their voices, such as:
  - drink water;
  - avoid caffeinated or sugary drinks;
  - no yelling or making atypical noises (e.g., growling);
  - use a quiet voice but DON'T whisper (it is vocally damaging).
- Provide a positive comment to a student for using good vocal hygiene, such as not shouting to get attention.
- Place a visual cue on the student's desk (like a picture of someone talking). When you hear vocal misuse, touch the picture on the desk to help remind the student to use good vocal hygiene techniques.