

Speech and language development checklists

Adapted from Communication Trust “Universally Speaking”

11–14 years

By age 11

Understanding of spoken language and verbal reasoning:

- Follow quite complex spoken directions (may include longer sentences with more information, new vocabulary and more complex grammar e.g. “remember to accurately measure the liquid before you add the crystals”).
- Understanding common, simple ‘sayings’ in context e.g. “Go on, Jess, nothing ventured, nothing gained”.
- See someone else’s point of view when they don’t necessarily agree with it.
- Understanding factual information, but may still find it difficult to understand information that needs to be inferred e.g. “So, in year 6, I imagine you did work on coastal erosion?” (meaning “did you work on this topic?”), or “That’s obviously a great joke, David, would you like to share it with the class?” (meaning – pay attention and listen, and I really don’t want you to share it).
- Start to understand sarcasm though it may need to have more exaggerated context, tone of voice and facial expression clues to help them understand.

Vocabulary:

- Pick up new vocabulary needed for learning specific to topic areas and more generally.
- Use clearer, more objective definitions of words, more similar to a dictionary (e.g. excited: moving from “I’m excited when it’s my birthday” to “very pleased or thrilled”).
- Understand that words have more than one meaning and can explain this.
- Use more interesting vocabulary when prompted e.g. ‘immense’ instead of ‘huge’, ‘stagger’ instead of ‘walk’.

Sentence structure and narrative:

- Use sentences of 7–11 words in 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.
- Tell interesting, entertaining and original stories, with a clear plot and often sub-plots.
- Explain the rules of a game/sequence of events in a simple but accurate way e.g. giving directions of how to get somewhere, or giving instructions about how to carry out a task.

Social interaction:

- Enjoy jokes based on double meanings, though 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 their style of language to suit the situation and the listener (e.g. friend vs parent vs teacher).

- Be aware when someone doesn't understand and try another way to get information across.
- Negotiate with friends and others to resolve conflicts.

By 13–14 years

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 order you need to complete the tasks in".
- Think about how they might persuade other people, including what they'll say if other views are different from their own, E.g. "I know you aren't into rugby, but there are a few of us going and after the match we're going for a pizza – it'll be a laugh".
- 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/late).
- Understand less obvious 'sayings', E.g. "Rome wasn't built in a day, you know".
- Understand and explain words and sayings with double meanings, E.g. "Lemons can leave a bitter taste" / "It was a bitter experience" / "The cold was bitter".

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. The law is meant to make sure that justice happens".
- Use spelling rules and patterns in words to get clues to understand word meaning, E.g. "Un...reliable – un means not, so this person isn't very reliable".
- Use more difficult words when prompted in formal speaking and writing tasks, E.g. Formal situation: "James is incredibly arrogant". With friends: "James is so full of himself – he's a pain".
- Confidently explain the meaning of words in different subjects, E.g. In Maths: quadratic equation, factorise, inequality. In Science: respiratory, digestion, metamorphosis.

Sentence structure and narrative:

- 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.