

Speech and language development checklists

Adapted from Communication Trust “Universally Speaking”

5–7 years

By age 5

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 coat, 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, e.g. animals, transport, food, etc.
- Understand a range of words to describe the idea of time, shape, texture, size and know in which context to use them, e.g. Soon, early and late; square, triangle and circle; soft, hard, and smooth; big, tiny and tall.
- 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 gloves, I wanted the spotty ones that match my hat”*.

Speech sounds:

- Produce speech that is clear and easy to understand, though may still have some immaturities:
 - ‘th’ sounds – typically produced as ‘f’ and ‘v’, and ‘r’ sound – typically produced as ‘w’.
 - Combinations of consonant sounds e.g. ‘pider’ (spider), ‘fower’ (flower), ‘bikkit’ (biscuit).
 - Words with 3 or more syllables may be mixed up e.g. ‘pasketti’ for spaghetti, ‘efalent’ for elephant.
- 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 – 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"*. Some immaturities may still be seen e.g. "sheeps", "I bringed".
- Use some irregular past tense words, e.g. *"I drank all my milk"*, *"She took my teddy"*. However, they may still overgeneralise the past tense rules e.g. using "fihgted" instead of "fought".
- 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 seaside and I made the biggest sandcastle ever and we ate fish and chips on newspaper"*.
- 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. *"Daddy was cross. We was late for the football. 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 sofa 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.
- Join in and organise role play with friends.
- 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 a lovely sunny day and it will be fun"*.
- Give details that they know are important and will influence the listener, e.g. *"Ahmed fell over that stone, Javid didn't push him"*.

By age 7

Attention, listening and understanding:

- Understand the key points they need to focus on in order to answer a question or follow an instruction and begin to ignore less important information, e.g. *“Four buses have nine passengers each but two 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. There may still be occasional errors with longer words, with words with 2/3 consonants together at the start (e.g. **scramble**, **stranger**), and with the ‘r’ and ‘th’ sounds.
- 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: 4 syllables
- 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 burglars can’t get in?”*
- 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”.* Occasional grammatical errors may still be seen.

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"*.