

The importance of high-quality oral language

Speaking and listening are vital skills for pupils to acquire. Not only do they form the foundations for competency in reading and writing, but they are also essential for thinking and communication (Higgins et al, 2015). While the ability to think and communicate enables pupils to access the curriculum, these areas are also essential for all aspects of life – during, but also importantly, beyond schooling.

During lessons, pupils need receptive and expressive language to access the curriculum. Listen to Kelly Challis, from the Driver Youth Trust, talk about the difference between expressive and receptive language, and ways you can develop both in the classroom. You can make notes using the [notes tab](#) (or your own notebook).



Direct Link: [Developing high-quality language - Kelly Challis, Driver Youth Trust](#)
Transcript: [Developing high-quality oral language - Kelly Challis, Driver Youth Trust](#)
([this link opens in a new window/tab](#))

As Kelly identifies, both receptive and expressive language enables pupils to access the curriculum. Pupils require receptive language to understand what is being asked of them, and expressive language to communicate their thoughts and ideas, and to demonstrate their learning. Vocabulary can be a key barrier in limiting pupils' expressive and receptive language and therefore, to support all your pupils to access the curriculum, it is important that you expose them to, and teach them the meanings of high-quality and high-utility language. When doing this, you must consider the language you are developing in the context of the subject you are teaching to develop pupils' disciplinary literacy.

Disciplinary literacy

Disciplinary literacy recognises that oracy skills are both general and subject specific (EEF, 2019). For example, the ability to respond in full sentences is a general skill, whereas the ability to correctly interpret the word “evaluate” is subject specific. This is because some vocabulary can carry different meanings in different subjects. In English Literature, “evaluate” questions often require pupils to justify their answers with reference to a personal response. Whereas in Physical Education, evaluation could ask pupils to consider the consequences of particular choices relating to diet or exercise. Therefore, developing pupils' general *and* subject specific oracy skills should be a high priority for all teachers.

How can you develop pupils' oracy skills?

You can develop pupils' oracy skills by:

- modelling using full sentences to respond to questions and encouraging pupils to do the same
- implicitly and explicitly teaching vocabulary

During this session, you will explore the second point in more detail.