

Developing high-quality oral language

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Having a focus on high quality oral language in the classroom is developing the foundation of good literacy skills. The first step in developing language skills is to consider your own language in the classroom:

- How accessible is it?
- How much you provide in one go?
- Do you use metaphors, sayings or subject specific vocabulary without explaining the meaning?

These are all important questions to consider.

Language can be split into two types: receptive and expressive.

Receptive language helps pupils *understand* spoken language by enabling us to:

- attend and listen to the speaker
- apply meaning to spoken words
- and understand grammatical markers.

Expressive language enables pupils to share their thoughts and feelings by:

- retrieving appropriate vocabulary from their memory stores
- recalling speech sounds and patterns
- and then mentally constructing the sentence according to grammatical rules,

To support pupil's receptive language in the classroom, you should give instructions:

- in small chunks
- in the order you want them completed.
- And can use prompts such as first, then and lastly.

To ensure pupils have understood, you can encourage pupils to repeat back instructions that you have given, whilst listening out for any misunderstanding.

To support pupil's expressive language in the classroom you should:

- Model and teach high-utility vocabulary
- Model the correct response if the learner has made a grammatical error with sensitivity - pay attention to errors with plurals or tenses.
- Encourage pupils to respond to questions in full sentences

When modelling and teaching vocabulary, you can introduce it by sounding it out and explaining its meaning before using it in a sentence. Plan to discuss unfamiliar terms before reading or writing them and use these terms in a context that the pupils will be familiar with to help them better understand.

Make discussion part of your classroom activity and use as a precursor to written work. During discussion, ensure you model good listening skills as well as oral language. Set the parameters for the discussion before it takes place and scaffold pupils responses by provide sentence starters such as, 'I would like to raise the point about...' and the response to that which could be 'I hear your point but I would like to say...'. By providing stock responses you support pupils to construct a good answer.

When asking pupils to share their ideas, ensure you give pupils time to think out loud and work through a response before. I always use the analogy of dropping a feather, rather than a stone, in a puddle to increase the thinking time I give pupils. To further support pupils who struggle to speak with clarity, consider recording their response for them to listen to. This will help them understand their current use of language which may help to identify where they can improve.

Without high quality oral language, pupils struggle to access the curriculum. Therefore, every teacher, regardless of subject or phase, should be a teacher of literacy.