



# Early Language Stimulation Strategies

Language skills are vital in the classroom and in daily life. Students with strong language skills are more likely to achieve better outcomes at school and less likely to have difficulties learning to read (Walker et al., 1994). This handout explores some strategies to support students' language learning and development.

**Keywords:** *language, language development, language stimulation, communication*

As children develop, they learn to use more mature and complex language. They learn this by listening to their parents, carers, teachers, siblings and other members of their community. There are a number of ways that language development can be supported and stimulated. Many of these strategies will benefit both typically developing children and those with language delay or disorder. Effective strategies include:

- **Model and repair** students' language. Modelling allows students to hear examples of a range of language structures in their correct form and context. For example,
  - Student: "Him felled down the stairs."
  - Teacher: "Yes. He fell down the stairs."
- **Expanding and Extending** students' utterances to expose them to more complex language.
  - When expanding a student's language, the adult repeats the sentence in a more mature form. For example,
    - Student: "Car go".
    - Teacher: "The car is going".
  - When extending, the adult repeats the sentence in a more mature form and provides additional information. For example,
    - Student: "Dad driving".
    - Teacher: "Yes. Dad is driving the car. He is going fast".

## General Strategies to Stimulate Language Development

- Engage students with a range of topics and experiences (e.g. going to the zoo or reading a book about a new topic). Students benefit from exposure to a high volume of oral language in a variety of contexts.
- Follow the student's lead and join in activities that they are interested in. This promotes students' participation in activities, interaction with others and objects and can build confidence. To do this, adults must abandon their agenda, and focus on observing and listening to the student's interests and responding to them.



- Play language-based games which incorporate the student's interests (e.g. their favourite cartoon character).
- Use multi-sensory learning by encouraging students to use different senses (e.g. "This is an apple. It smells sweet and it feels smooth").
- Link new information to knowledge and experiences the student already has (e.g. "A doctor works in a hospital. Remember the last time you saw a doctor? He helped you to get well.").
- Provide positive praise. Be specific with praise so the student knows what they have done well (e.g. "That was really good reading. I like how you took your time to read through the words").
- Model short, grammatically correct sentences to encourage students to use complete sentences and understand how words are combined.
- Emphasise a variety of new words such as verbs (e.g. kick, fall), adjectives (e.g. big, green) and prepositions (e.g. in, on, under). Verbs are particularly important for developing grammar skills.
- Bring attention to tricky vocabulary during daily interactions. Talk about which group the word belongs to, how it looks, tastes, feels, where it is found and what it is used for (as appropriate).
- When using new or unfamiliar words, explain the word's meaning and use it in a sentence (e.g. "Gorgeous means beautiful. The weather today is gorgeous").
- Add language to familiar routines by describing activities they are being done (e.g. putting shoes on, tidying up).
- Practice composing sentences when looking at a picture. Students can also practice making a story using three or more pictures.

### **Hanen's OWL Approach**

The Hanen Center (2012) recommends OWL (i.e. Observing, Waiting and Listening) strategies to support student's language development.

- **Observing:** Observe the student's interests, how they communicate and what they respond best to.
- **Waiting:** Allow time for students to comprehend and process what has been said to them, as well as allow time for them to formulate responses in their own way.
- **Listening:** Listen to the student's communication to build an understanding of their current skills and areas to provide additional support.



### **Activities to Support Language Development**

- **Shared Book Reading:** Reading gives students the opportunity to hear new vocabulary in varied grammatical sentences as well as to support their comprehension skills. To make the most out of shared book reading:
  - Choose books the student is interested in.
  - Make a regular time to read with the student. Encourage parents to also do this at home.
  - Take turns with the student to follow the words and point out objects in the pictures.
  - Explain the meaning of new vocabulary encountered in the text.
  - Comment on objects in the pictures.
  - Ask questions from the story. For example, asking 'wh' questions such as 'who is in the story?', 'what are they doing?', 'where are they?' etc.
  - Encourage students to predict what will come next in the story.
  - In small groups, have students take turns asking questions and commenting about the book. Discuss what has happened and predict what may happen next.
- **Play:** Play provides an opportunity for students to develop their language (e.g. vocabulary, listening and following instructions), social skills (e.g. turn taking) and ability to problem solve. At playtime:
  - Be involved at playtime and share activities with students.
  - Provide models of language about what the student is doing as well as social language.
  - Play games which encourage the student to communicate, share and take turns.
- **Language Scrapbooks:** Sort a range of pictures into categories and paste items in that category onto one page (e.g. transport - paste in pictures of trains, trucks, cars etc.) Write the names of items next to the pictures. If there is more than one common name for an item, write them all down to expand students' vocabulary (e.g. pawpaw may also be called papaya).



### Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or [hello@languagedisorder.org.au](mailto:hello@languagedisorder.org.au)

Website: [languagedisorder.org.au](http://languagedisorder.org.au)

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