

# Oral Language Resources

These resources were compiled to provide educators with essential foundational knowledge to support students' oral language development. The information is not meant to be comprehensive. For more information, please refer to the references. This document includes an introduction and information about:

- ▶ **Multiturn conversations**
- ▶ **Peer-to-peer language interactions**
- ▶ **Inferential language/decontextualized language**
- ▶ **Syntactic development**
- ▶ **Narrative language**

## Introduction

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How much you talk and respond to young children and what you say to them can positively impact their oral language development. In turn, children with better oral language skills will be better communicators and, eventually, better readers. This document describes strategies for educators to support students' oral language development:

## Multiturn Conversations

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**Multiturn conversations** involve back-and-forth turns during which you build on and connect with a student's statements, questions, and responses. Ways to make conversations a priority in your classroom:

- Use every opportunity to engage students in conversation (e.g., before school, mealtime, center time, playground time, transitions).
- Talk with all students.
- Be mindful that some students are quieter than others and may need more encouragement and opportunities to talk.
- Comment on student's words and actions to create a gentle volley of language.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Provide students time to respond.
- Stay engaged in conversations.
- Model language that includes rich vocabulary, abstract words and concepts, and a variety of grammatical forms.
- Reflect on conversations with students and use your reflections to differentiate modeling during your next conversation.
- Scaffold language using sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure during conversations.
- Have concrete goals about how to develop students' oral language.
- Encourage and facilitate peer-to-peer language interactions.

## Peer-to-Peer Language Interactions

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**Peer-to-peer language interactions** are conversations among students. For some students, these interactions happen naturally but other students may need teacher support and encouragement. To encourage peer-to-peer language interactions, teachers can:

- Provide ample opportunities for small-group interactions.
- Provide multiple opportunities and meaningful contexts for students to engage in discussions.
- Encourage sharing and learning from each other.
- Foster social skills that enable students to develop secure relationships with others.
- Provide opportunities for students to be “teachers”.
- Prompt students to ask other students for assistance.

## Inferential Language

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To support oral language development, teachers can engage students in conversations that support the use and comprehension of **inferential language**. Inferential language (also called decontextualized language) focuses on topics removed from the here and now. For example, you use inferential language when you make a prediction about a story or describe how you baked cookies last weekend. Inferential, or decontextualized, language is language used to describe past or future events or talk about people, places, actions, and objects not visible in the moment. Support the use of inferential language by facilitating conversations and engaging students in higher-level thinking before, during, and after read-alouds. Use open-ended questions to challenge students to think critically about narrative and informational texts.

By modeling such advanced language, you can demonstrate how to create an accurate and specific, visual representation of the message you are communicating. As with other aspects of language, however, just modeling is insufficient. Provide students with numerous opportunities to practice using precise language themselves. You can accomplish this by asking students to:

- Tell you at the end of the day exactly what they did during center time.
- Tell you as you line up what they want to do on the playground.
- Describe to the class what they did over the weekend.
- Paint/draw pictures and then describe them to friends who cannot see the images.
- Hide special objects around the room and then use only language, not gestures, to direct friends to find them.
- Make up a story about a favorite character.
- Connect something a character did in a story with their own lives or experiences.
- Tell you about their favorite thing to do at home.
- Share what they would do if they suddenly had a fantasy superpower, such as flying, becoming really huge, or very tiny.
- Tell the class what they want to do as an occupation when they grow up.
- Describe what happened at their last birthday or holiday celebration.
- Draw bird’s-eye view maps of the classroom layout and then describe them to peers.

## Syntactic Development

One aspect of oral language is syntax. Syntax, which is an element of grammar, is the rules used to put words together to make phrases and sentences. **Syntactic development** is how children gradually develop expressive oral language that follows these rules when they talk and eventually write. The complexity of children’s oral language increases over time, typically in systematic ways. The table below shows a sequence that moves from two-word statements to complex sentence structures that follow other grammatical rules, such as how to use plurals and past tense conjugations.

### Example of a Child’s Syntactic Development

Child Says	Demonstrated Syntactic Feature
1. "Eat cracker."	Putting two words together to communicate.
2. "Eating crackers."	Putting words together with suffixes: -ing, -s.
3. "I was eating crackers." And eventually, "I ate the crackers."	Putting words together to form a complete sentence. Use of regular and irregular past tense conjugations also develops within phrases and sentences.
4. "Can I eat crackers?"	Putting words together to form a question.
5. "I am eating crackers, and you are drinking milk."	Putting two ideas together into one complex sentence.

## Narrative Language

Narrative language refers to the production or comprehension of a fictional or real account of an experience. **Narrative language skills** include the ability to organize information in a logical sequence, as well as connect that information using appropriate complex grammatical structures.

Explicitly engage students in developing narrative language skills by modeling, teaching, and encouraging the use of complex grammatical structures (e.g., compound sentences) and elements of linguistic structure (e.g., connectives and pronoun references). Students need to learn complex grammatical structures and the specific elements of narrative language that are used to describe experiences or events. The table below presents several complex grammatical structures recommended to teach students in kindergarten through third grade. Teachers are encouraged to identify and teach additional complex grammatical structures if students are ready.

### Complex Grammatical Structures

Structure	Description	Example
Compound sentence	two complete, related thoughts, joined by a coordinating conjunction	<b>My favorite food is pizza, and my favorite pizza topping is pepperoni.</b>
Subordinate clause	a clause, beginning with a subordinating conjunction, the supplements an independent clause and cannot stand on its own	We'll use the computers <b>when we finish the science project.</b>
Adverbial clause	a subordinate clause that modifies a verb, adjective, or adverb	I ran <b>as fast as I could.</b>
Prepositional phrase	a phrase beginning with a preposition to demonstrate a relationship such as location or manner	My pencil is <b>under the table.</b>

The specific elements of narrative language include components of story grammar (characters, setting, plot, etc.) and components of linguistic structure (shown in the table below). Along with complex grammatical structures, elements of linguistic structure and elements of story grammar contribute to both oral and reading comprehension.

### Components of Linguistic Structure

Element	Description	Examples
Connectives	using conjunctions, adverbs, and other devices to create connections between parts of a narrative	<b>because, but then, later, instead, suddenly</b>
Noun phrases	using noun phrases (e.g. article + adjective + noun) for precise descriptions	<b>My brother's friend ate all the chocolate-chip cookies!</b>
Verb phrases	inflecting verbs to denote the timing of events	She <b>ran</b> to school. She <b>will ride</b> the bus home.
Pronoun references	providing clear references to pronouns	<b>Tommy</b> was sick, so <b>his</b> mom made soup with <b>her</b> brand-new pot.

To engage students in the use of narrative language you can ask them to:

- Predict actions in the text based on title and/or images if they have sufficient prior knowledge of the story context.
- Summarize stories or factual information using a graphic organizer.
- Summarize or relate the main idea, events, or other specific details of a passage.

### References

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