

# Language and Reading

# SKILLS

*One of the most important things that young children learn to do is communicate with others. As providers or parents, you can do much to enhance the development of language in your children. A rich language start has great paybacks as children learn to read and write.*

*Kids need to talk, be talked to, and read to, in order to develop the language skills that will last them their whole lives. Provide them with experiences that include trips to the park, store, library story hour. Even walks around the neighborhood can produce lots to talk about.*

## Speech Activities Ideas:

*Speech (speaking) is the production of sounds that make up words and sentences. There is a wide difference in the age children begin to speak. Speech begins with the babbling sounds an infant makes, progressing to clear words that carry specific messages. You can see these skills developing in a preschooler as you notice him/her talking in longer sentences, continuing to expand his/her vocabulary, asking lots of questions, enjoy making up and telling stories, and recognizing and pointing out specific sounds in words she/he hears spoken.*

## Listening for rhyming words

**Materials:** Mother Goose or other rhyming stories

**To Do:** Enjoy a rhyme with your child. Singing it encourages closer listening to the rhythms and rhymes. Say two words from the rhyme. Have your child repeat them putting out one hand for each word. If the words rhyme, clap your hands together, if not put your hands behind your back. Repeat a few times or switch roles.

*To Expand:* Say or sing simple rhymes, but leave off the rhyming words for your child to supply. Instead of listening for rhyming words, do the same thing except find words with the same beginning sounds. Perhaps stomp your feet instead of clapping your hands.

## Listening for beginning sounds and saying them

**Materials:** Basket or box, labeled with a different upper and lower case letter weekly

**To Do:** Each week tape a different letter onto an empty shoe box or basket. Read a story or rhyme that has that sound in it frequently. Talk about the sound the letter makes by bouncing on the start of the word. Choose sounds that are easy to hear at first. Such as: S, M, D, F, B, H, P. Throughout the week have the children look for objects or pictures that begin with that sound and collect them in the box. If this is too difficult, provide two items and have the children select the correct one.

*To Expand:* Have a “Sound Supper” or “Listening Lunch!” Try to eat as many items with that week’s sound. For instance, during “Mm” week try macaroni and cheese, milk, muffins, mixed vegetables and melon!

## Language is part of a child’s total development.

As with physical and social growth, there is a definite pattern to a child’s development of language. There are four distinct skills involved in the development of language. These skills are **speaking, listening, writing, and reading.** These skills are mastered by children in different ways and at different levels. For instance, many young children are better speakers than listeners.

## Create A Story

**Materials:** Your imagination, paper, crayons, or markers

**To Do:** Have fun making up a stories with the children, one sentence at a time. Decide on a topic. An adult or a child can begin the story by completing the following sentence, “Once upon a time . . .” Continue taking turns making up new sentences to tell the story. Eight to ten sentences make for a nice simple story.

*To Expand:* You can also write down the story on a piece of paper. The children can draw pictures to go along with the words.

## Talk Like Me

**Materials:** Your imagination, tape recorder (optional)

**To Do:** Children love to experiment with their voices. Count, say the alphabet, or recite a nursery rhyme using your normal voice. Now change your voice. For example: talk very fast or slow; use a high pitched voice, then a deep bass voice; or break words down into choppy syllables. One fun idea is to have the children sing a song such as “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” using first a happy voice, then a sad voice, or a voice of someone who is very cold.

*To Expand:* Record these different voices onto a tape so the children can listen to all of their voices.

## Telephone Talk

**To Do:** Practice using a telephone and speaking politely. Teach the proper way to say hello, how to respond to the caller’s questions, how to give a message or ask to call back, etc. Play “telephone” with one another using play phones. This is a great way to teach the give and take (speaking and listening) of conversation.



## Listening Activities Ideas:

*Children learn about the world around them by listening. Of all the language skills that people acquired, listening is the one they use most throughout life, especially during early childhood. Listening is the process used to convert spoken language and sound into meaning in the mind. These developing skills are noticeable in your preschooler as you observe him/her listening with understanding to directions and discussions, following two and three-step directions and experimenting with words (giving them new beginning sounds, rhyming).*

## Where’s the Timer

**Materials:** Something that makes a steady sound such as a timer that “ticks” or music box

**To Do:** Have one or all of the children leave the room. While they are gone, wind up and hide the timer. Bring the child (ren) back in the room and encourage them to listen to find the timer. Take turns hiding the timer, putting it in tougher places as the children’s listening skills sharpen.

*To Expand:* Look around your home and find other objects that make sounds. Explore the objects letting the children make the sounds. Have one child turn his/her back to the collection and choose one item to make the sound. Can the child guess which object was used?

## Grocery Play

**Materials:** Grocery bag(s), empty food containers (boxes, cans, etc.)

**To Do:** Spread food containers out as you talk with the children about each product. Model being the “customer” by requesting 2-3 items. After you have given your order, have the child bag your groceries. (You can also introduce sorting foods into frozen foods, cans, boxes, etc.) Put the groceries back and change your order. Eventually, add items to the list to encourage sharper listening skills.

*To Expand:*

A. Work in pairs and play “I Spy Something. . .” using the grocery items. Use describing words about size, shape, color, texture and use—adding more clues until the child selects the correct grocery.

*continued*

**B.** Lay 5-6 grocery items on the floor or on a tray. Ask the children to close their eyes and remove one item away from the group hiding it behind your back or in a pillow case. Which one is missing? Continue the game allowing the children to take turns removing the items.

### Reading Books

**To Do:** Take some time to explore the book before sharing it with your group. Look at the front of the book. Read and point out the title words. Can the group guess what the book might be about by the cover? Now read the book and follow-up with some questions: Did you like the story? Why or why not? What was your favorite part? Did this story end the way you thought it would? Why or why not? Would you change the ending if you could? How? Did anything happen that surprised you? Where did this story take place? Who was your favorite character?

### Match the Sounds

**Materials:** Margarine, cream cheese, or film containers (8) assorted materials such as flour, paper clips, nails, buttons, coins, sand, beads, etc.

**To Do:** Fill the containers making pairs of the same materials: 2 with a few paper clips, 2 with some flour, etc. Secure the lids with glue or tape. Mix all of the containers up and have the children pick one at a time, shake, and listen. Can they find the matching container by listening?

*To Expand:* Can the children guess what's inside?

### Guess That Sound game

**Materials:** Glass of water, block, tin can, plastic bowl and a stick (pencil) to tap the objects.

**To Do:** Place the objects on top of a low table or on a hard surface. Tap the objects and talk about how they sound. Let the children explore the sounds. Now have one or more children close their eyes. Tap one object and ask them to guess which object you tapped. Have the children take a turn being the "tapper."

*To Expand:* Once the children become familiar with all of the sounds, tap several objects in a row and ask them which object you tapped first, second, and so on.

### Writing Activities Ideas:

*During the early childhood years children are developing the physical skills needed to write later on in school. It is important to provide young children with many activities that promote eye-hand coordination and small muscle development. You will see a child's pre-writing skills emerge as she/he uses scribbles, shapes and symbols to represent words or thoughts and shows an understanding of writing as a way to communicate.*

### Tip:

Pushing a chunky peg into a peg board strengthens the same muscles used to write.

### Add Words to Drawings

**Materials:** Drawing materials (paper, crayons, markers)

**To Do:** Offer to write descriptive words or the child's simple story to go with the drawing. As children dictate stories to you and watch you write the words, you are helping children make the association between the written and spoken word.

*To Enhance:* Offer half-sheet papers with a sticker on each paper. Ask the child to tell you a story about the sticker. Be sure to ask for a story title, and write "The End" at the bottom of the paper.

### Letter Play

**Materials:** Play dough or soft clay, paper with large letters written on them

**To Do:** Explore the dough together. What can your finger make it do? Show the children how to roll the dough into snakes. Next, introduce the paper by showing and naming each letter. Shape the play

dough snakes around the letter lines as you continue to talk about the name and sound of the letter.  
*To Expand:* Use this same activity to introduce lowercase letters, shapes, and numerals. Children have great ownership of their names, so perhaps work with those letters first.

## Writing Letters

**Materials:** Two cookie sheets with sides or two pie tins, small amount of salt to fill the bottom sheets/tins.

**To Do:** Fill the tins with enough salt to cover the bottom. Play for a bit! Pretend to glue together the “V” fingers of your writing hand (the index and pointer fingers). This will strengthen the same muscles used in writing. Write a letter or shape in the salt as the children watch. Tell them step by step what you are doing, especially where to start and how your finger stays in the salt for most letters. Shake gently to erase. Try the letter or shape together on the tins. Play copycat!

*To Expand:* As the children become more skilled, ask them to write a letter or shape without a visual clue. Try spelling out names or simple words. For variety, try different things in the tray: fine sand from a vacation beach, tasty presweetened Kool-Aid, instant pudding (either powdered or make), whipped cream or frosting. Yum, a fun reward after each letter! Shaving cream or gel is a fun alternative, but be careful of eyes.

### Tip:

Introduce the tasty options after or instead of the salt. Salt is toxic in large quantities.

## Following Paths

**Materials:** Stickers, “path” paper with simple lines, shapes or large letters written on them

**To Do:** Using finger muscles efficiently reduces the stress on them and makes writing more appealing. This sticky job will work at improving finger strength so writing will be more fun. Have your children select stickers and a path sheet. Demonstrate how to remove a sticker using your “pincher” grip (thumb/index/middle fingers) and stick it on the pathway line. Have the children complete the pathway so it is a solid line of stickers.

*To Expand:* Decrease the size of the stickers as the children’s muscles become more toned. Try driving a small car or walking figures on the pathway when complete. Go left to right like when you read. Use stickers to write your child’s initials or name (one letter per sheet).

## Name Writing

**Materials:** Ziploc baggie with child’s name labeled clearly on it, popsicle sticks or tongue depressors or post it notes - enough for one for each letter of each child’s name

**To Do:** Write the letters of each child’s name, one letter per stick. Use the capital for the first letter only. Color the capital letter stick to emphasize the start of the name. Ask the children to match the stick letters to the letters in their name on the bag. As the children become more comfortable, have them “write” or spell their name by laying the sticks side by side without looking at the baggie. Store the letter sticks in the baggie.

*To Expand:* Which letter is missing? Remove one letter stick and have the child tell you which one is missing. Verbally spell the names together, randomly removing a stick each time until memorized.



## Word Box

**Materials:** recipe cards, recipe box or shoe box

**To Do:** Make a word box by filling it with written words (one to a card) that children may want to use in their beginning writings. Some ideas: Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, Thank You, I love you, sibling and pet names, etc.)

*To Expand:* Provide folded paper to encourage “card” or letter writing and drawing. Be sure to have your word box handy.

## Reading Activities Ideas:

*Reading to children is one of the most significant ways of enhancing a child's language development. As you read to children you will notice them: beginning to understand similarities and differences between spoken and written language, learning about the parts of a story (setting, plot, character), learning about the parts of a book (cover, title, illustrations), learning the meaning of new words, lengthening their attention span, strengthening their listening skills, learning how to treat books with respect, and learning how much fun reading is!*

## Beginning Words

**Materials:** Ziploc baggies, stapler, advertisements, labels, menus, etc.

**To Do:** Go through newspapers, shopping bags, store flyers and have the children pick out store logos or brand labels they recognize and can “read.” Together, cut them into baggie size pieces and tuck into each baggie, zipping closed. Staple zipper sides together in a stack to create a book that can be “read.”

*To Expand:* Create Ziploc books for beginning sounds, letters, family members and friends labeled with names, birthday wish book labeled with names of wishes, colors or shapes labeled with names, and so on.

## Story Detective

**Materials:** Magnifying glass and simple stories with a clear beginning, middle and end. Fairy tales, or the classic “three” stories (Three Little Pigs, Three Bears, Three Billy Goats Gruff) are wonderful for this.

**To Do:** Share the story page by page! Start with the cover - what will it be about and what are your clues? Have the children be story detectives by finding the characters, the setting, the beginning, middle and ending, the seasons, night or day, something real, something pretend, etc. Use the magnifying glass to spot the clues! Predict what will happen before turning the pages. What were your clues?

*To Expand:* Using the same type of questions have the children draw the answers. Let the children “read” you a favorite story by turning the pages and telling you about the illustrations.



## Acting Out Stories

**Materials:** Paper plates, decorating materials, such as crayons, markers, yarn, gift wrap, cotton balls, etc.

**To Do:** Enjoy a simple story with the children. Talk about who would be needed to act the story out. Create the characters from the story using the paper plate as the face.

*To Expand:*

**A.** Act out the story as it is being read. Turn the character plates into necklaces for more fun.

**B.** Have each child make a complete set of all the characters in the story. Hold up the characters who appear as the story is read.

**C.** Add costumes! Streamers tucked into pants make great tails. Blankets are wonderful fur for animal skin or royal robes. Let the children's imaginations soar!



## Alphabet Cards

**Materials:** Homemade or purchased set of alphabet cards (capital and lower case)

### To Do:

- Place all cards in a pile, face down. Take turns drawing a card and saying the letter name.
- Place all cards face down. Draw a card. If the player knows the card, they keep it and get another turn.
- Sort the letters into two piles - capital and lower case.
- Match capital to lower case.
- Place all cards face down. Draw two cards. If they are the same letter, player keeps them and gets another turn. Play until all cards are picked up. (Concentration Game)
- Place all letter cards except vowels in a pile. Draw a card and say a word that begins with the letter drawn. This can be played while driving too. Have a child name a letter and say a word that begins with that letter.
- Treasure Hunt! Draw a letter and find a toy or object that begins with that letter.

## Magazine Play

**Materials:** Old magazines, scissors, paper, glue, markers, or crayons

**To Do:** Magazines are full of wonderful, stimulating material for pre-readers. Here are some fun ideas to try with children.

- Categorize - Have the children look for pictures of things that are the same. For example, pictures of people smiling, pictures of things that are red, pictures of things that go, etc.
- Letter Identification - Print a letter at the top of a page in a magazine. Encourage the children to find that letter in the words on the page below and circle it with a marker.
- Name Collage - Use the headlines from stories for this activity. Help the children find letters that are in their name and cut them out. Have the children glue the letters onto paper to spell their name.
- Find The Missing Parts - Children need to be able to distinguish small differences in objects they are looking at for later reading experiences. (differences in size, shape, position, color, etc.) Find large pictures in a magazine. Remove parts of the pictures by cutting it out or coloring over it with a black marker. See if the child can tell you what is missing from the picture. Example: tails of animals, wheels from a car, or the knob on a door.

*To Expand:* After exploring magazines with your children, they may be ready to create their own magazine. Give them some sheets of paper, markers, and glue and encourage them to make their own magazine about anything they want. When finished, have them read them to you, each other, or parents.

## Water Play with letters

**Materials:** Sponges or old washcloths, sensory table/tub/bathtub/dishpan for water

**To Do:** Cut out letters from the sponges or washcloths. You could begin by just cutting out the letters in each child's name. Add the letters to the water play. Ask the children to find letters in the water.

*To Expand:* Ask the children to wash their hands with letter "A", the boat with letter "B", etc. Include spatial words like above, under, behind, etc.

