

LISTENING AND SPEAKING

“Reading and writing float on a sea of talk.” James Britton

Listening and speaking skills are integral to the development of **critical thinking skills** and lead into the process of guided reading and writing at different stages. Speaking and listening tasks should be carefully structured to ensure progress from one stage to the next.

Schools provide many **opportunities** and unique advantages for developing children’s **speaking and listening skills**. Such development depends upon creating conditions for them to interact with others: to engage frequently in **worthwhile talk and attentive listening**, build a good stock of words, explore how language works, understand what is said to them and respond appropriately - well before reading begins.

The best work with young children also draws frequently on the power of **story, drama and music** to fire their **imagination** and enrich their language. The importance for young children of **learning co-operatively** in language-rich contexts cannot be overstated.

Schools should therefore give a high priority to the development of children’s speaking and listening skills, both because they are intrinsically valuable and because they provide the **foundations** for the systematic teaching and learning of phonics, and higher order reading and writing skills.

READING AND WRITING

Being able to read and write is important, not only for academic success, but as general life skills that are essential in a literate society. Therefore identifying ways to improve children's reading and writing is a crucial matter.

A lot has been said about the need to focus on the development of cognitive (e.g., language, decoding) skills to support and improve children's reading and writing. Nevertheless we should never lose sight that the focus must be on enhancing **motivation** to read and write.

To help pupils achieve high standards, it is essential to provide a clear, step by step process, often known as *scaffolding*, that develops key knowledge and skills in a participative way.

Reading in the classroom:

It is important to create a comfortable, attractive area within the classroom and within the school where children can go to read for **enjoyment**. An armchair, rugs, bright wall hangings and cushions all help to make the reading area appealing and pleasant for children. Texts should be displayed where children can easily access them.

Reading areas ideally contain a range of **fiction and non-fiction** texts selected to suit the interest, cognitive level and range of ability of the children. Authentic texts and real books should be provided. In the early years of primary it can be tempting to provide only "**decodable**" **phonic based books** for children to read. However children must be given the opportunity to read a range of traditional fairytales and familiar colourful storybooks with repetition and rhyme to develop a wider range of reading skills, a fuller comprehension and a love for books. In the middle and upper stages of primary, texts of different types and levels should be available so that children can select books to read for different purposes; E.g.: investigation on a certain topic, recipe books, picture based instruction books to create a little handcraft.

Reading at home:

Children should be given the opportunity **to take books home** to read. Recordings of texts and stories can be provided for the children to listen to on headphones at home. Teacher must be careful to provide books at the child's own comfortable reading level.

Writing in the classroom:

A **guidance in writing** is very important to enable children to organise their ideas before tackling a piece of writing. Teachers therefore should ensure a proper **modelling** of the required activity. The use of drafts, graphic organisers, maps of ideas, checklists and word-banks (displayed on classroom walls) have proven very valuable in enhancing children's productions.

The **four stages** to develop **good independent creative writing** are:

1. Modelled: The teacher, as expert, in front of the class demonstrates all the writing and thinking out loud, telling children everything he/ she is doing. While articulating the process, the teacher also emphasises specific teaching points related to the lesson objectives.

2. Shared: Usually a follow on from modelled writing and is very often a whole-class activity. The approach is again a “think aloud” about writing but with the children involved in a kind of problem-solving approach.

3. Guided: Step between teacher directed writing and independent and creative writing. Practice should be provided at all stages from year one through to year six. For this technique, the teacher will usually work with small groups and the writing will build on oral discussion and sometimes follow on from modelled and shared writing, depending on the levels of the children and their previous knowledge and skills. In this strategy, children are usually grouped on the basis of ability and need and the teaching is tailored to specific needs of the group.

4. Independent:

This is where the students effectively make use of written language for their own purposes or as assigned by the teacher. These writing pieces can be anything, from creative stories and reports to writing journals or letters to friends and family.

Students use ideas from shared writing to produce their own independent piece, refer to charts and other materials to revise and edit composition.

This part of teaching writing to children must always include a time to share. This provides them not only recognition, but an opportunity to receive feedback.