

# Language for Learning

## A Checklist for Language Difficulties

### Secondary Level

Developed by Speech-Language Pathologists from the  
Language Learning Disability - Special Interest Group (Vic)

**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Year Level:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Completed by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Completed:** \_\_\_\_\_

This checklist is designed to enable teachers to identify students who have language learning difficulties and describe how these problems may present.

The features described are signs of language difficulty that may influence the student's ability to participate in social interactions, classroom instruction and/or meet the curriculum demands across different subject areas.

The features are organised into three categories:

- 1) academic and literate language use
- 2) behavioural characteristics
- 3) speaking & listening skills

Language use can be influenced by a number of factors including motivation, anxiety, peer influences and demands of particular subject areas. Therefore collaboration between school personnel is important to provide a comprehensive understanding of the student's use of language in a variety of contexts. You will also need to consider the student's 'history'. For example, did the student have a speech or language difficulty at a younger age or is English the student's first language?

If you have any doubts about a student's language and learning skills, please discuss them with a Speech-Language Pathologist.

## 1) ACADEMIC AND LITERATE LANGUAGE USE

- has delayed progress in literacy skills including: decoding, reading for meaning, punctuation, proof reading, spelling, handwriting, language based maths tasks
- has reduced written output compared to able peers
- written work can be disjointed or poorly organised, has difficulty providing information relevant to the topic or task
- has difficulty taking notes from spoken or written text, including paraphrasing and summarising
- has difficulty learning subject specific language and new terminology
- has difficulty using formal/literate styles of language, e.g. presenting, reporting, debating

## 2) BEHAVIOUR

### HAS DIFFICULTY PROCESSING AUDITORY INFORMATION:

- has difficulty paying attention, listening and discriminating speech in a noisy environment
- is inattentive and restless in listening situations
- may tire easily and 'tune out' at times
- is slow to process information
- needs extra time to respond verbally and to organise answers;
- frequently asks for clarification of information/instructions

### DISGUISES LEARNING PROBLEMS BY USING A RANGE OF COPING STRATEGIES OR ADOPTING BEHAVIOURS WHICH INTERFERE/IMPACT ON LEARNING:

- waits to observe other students before responding; may copy other student's work
- distracts other students and/or acts the 'class clown'
- interacts inappropriately with teachers and/or other students
- fails to follow class rules
- is quiet and does not draw attention to self in class
- tends not to participate or contribute to discussions
- rushes in impulsively, seemingly 'without thinking'
- shows evidence of aggression, depression, frustration
- becomes frustrated when communicating, e.g. says "You know what I mean" or "It doesn't matter"

### HAS DIFFICULTY PLANNING TASKS AND WORKING INDEPENDENTLY:

- shows disorganised behavior, e.g. forgets homework, loses jumper, arrives late
- needs explicit explanation of organisational routines that are usually learned quickly by peers, e.g. timetable routines and changes

Has difficulty with:

- using a diary
- completing tasks
- handing work in on time
- using effective study routines
- organising and sequencing information
- applying research skills
- monitoring performance and progress through a task

#### DEMONSTRATES DIFFICULTY WITH SOCIAL SKILLS:

- makes inappropriate comments; may be related to previous topics
- body language and facial expressions may indicate disinterest or disengagement
- tends not to clarify information, or seeks excessive clarification
- has difficulty making and maintaining friendships
- has difficulty sustaining conversations due to problems in taking turns and introducing and maintaining topics
- takes ambiguous language seriously, e.g. sarcasm, jokes, slang
- has difficulty understanding and using social/conversational language with peers, including colloquial expressions and teenage 'slang'
- has difficulty interpreting social cues, e.g. facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, innuendo, sarcasm, humour
- has difficulty using language to sort out social situations, e.g. to persuade, negotiate, bargain or gossip

### 3) SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS

#### DEMONSTRATES DIFFICULTY WITH LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION:

- has difficulty remembering sequences of verbal information, e.g. days of the week, months of the year, telephone numbers, times tables
- remembers only part of a long instruction or message
- confuses directions, particularly those not given in order of the action required, e.g. Start on your revision sheets after you have handed in your essay
- misinterprets indirect requests and subtle remarks, e.g. it is advisable you finish your work by Friday; I want to hear a pin drop; pull up your socks
- comprehends 'concrete' language but has difficulty understanding more abstract language, e.g. idioms, similes, proverbs and metaphors
- comprehends only fragments of information or gets the wrong message

#### SHOWS LIMITED RANGE AND FLEXIBILITY OF VOCABULARY:

- has a narrow understanding of word meanings, e.g. fails to comprehend multiple meanings of words in different contexts
- has difficulty with retrieving words from memory and, or frequently uses non-specific words, e.g. sort of, stuff, junk
- has restricted range of vocabulary, e.g. relies on familiar words

## HAS DIFFICULTY WITH LANGUAGE EXPRESSION:

- gives inappropriate responses to questions
- speaks in short, simple sentences, connecting ideas with 'and' or 'then'
- language use is less mature and sophisticated than peers
- has difficulty giving instructions for games or directions to an exact location
- may have a lot to say but lacks specific detail, leaving the listener confused; has difficulty getting to the point when explaining something
- speech is hesitant, filled with pauses or numerous 'ums', repetitions or rewording
- has trouble providing accurate and specific information, e.g. when asked to give the cooking method, may list the equipment instead
- mispronounces and confuses longer or similar sounding words, e.g. constipate/consummate; elaborate/evaporate

## HAS DIFFICULTY WITH 'TEXT' LEVEL LANGUAGE:

- has difficulty gaining information from written and spoken text without teacher assistance
- fails to fully comprehend text, e.g. has difficulty drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes
- has difficulty drawing inferences, i.e. connecting what's on the page, what's in your head and reading between the lines
- has difficulty 'seeing' the connection or relationships between more complex ideas
- has difficulty identifying the main idea and providing supporting details relevant to a topic
- has difficulty paraphrasing or putting information into own words
- has difficulty making sense of pictorial information; may have difficulty following films as gets 'caught up' in the action sequence

## ANY OTHER INFORMATION

It is often helpful to think about the student's talking, reading and writing skills in different situations, e.g. classroom, school ground, home. You may also want to comment on the student's confidence, self esteem etc.

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OzChild Education Services delivers a range of professional support and programs in partnership with schools including speech therapy, assessments and our Lift Off With Language program.

For more information call 03 9695 2200 or email [educationservices@ozchild.com.au](mailto:educationservices@ozchild.com.au)

This checklist may be copied for use in schools

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