

Guidance for Observation and Target Setting in Communication and Language (EYFS)

Ofsted Definition of Teaching in the Early Years:

Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress.

6 Key Questions to ask when observing Communication and Language:

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
1	How does the teacher model and encourage listening and attention through role play, stories and shared experiences?	For example: • Does the teacher model effective listening? • Are children encouraged to listen and take turns? • Do children hear a variety of rhymes, books and stories from a range of cultures, including languages other than English? • Do children engage in games, songs and rhymes with repeated refrains, turn-taking and replies (e.g. Simon Says)?
2	How is the environment organised so children can enjoy listening, sound and music independently?	For example, does the teacher provide: • environment/s where listening is facilitated e.g outdoor story chair, dens with selection of books/games? • instruments for musical play? • encouragement and support to access planned opportunities for listening?
3	How does the teacher use language, gesture and shared thinking to support children's understanding during play and routines?	For example, does the teacher use: • clear directions involving one action at a time? • mime and gesture when a new activity is introduced?

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
		sustained shared thinking that extends language and conversation, rather than children simply copying a peer?
4	How does the teacher develop children's understanding through prediction, sequencing and discussion of stories?	For example, does the teacher - encourage children to discuss ideas; to predict, explain, speculate and draw conclusions? - support children to sequence events and experiences? - Use stories to develop language and thinking?
5	How does the teacher extend children's vocabulary and speaking skills through modelling and interaction?	For example, does the teacher - introduce and reinforce new vocabulary? - model language for different contexts? - encourage children to talk, explain and share ideas? - respond meaningfully to children's use of language and speech?
6	How does the teacher give children time and opportunity to initiate and sustain conversations with peers and adults?	For example, does the teacher - plan activities and resources to develop children's conversation? - create an environment in which children have time to think and respond? - provide opportunities for extended conversation? - encourage children to communicate with peers and adults?

Potential **Communication and Language** Specific Targets on Lesson Analysis Forms.

Lesson design and delivery, including sequencing and choice of teaching methods Next Steps:
Plan specific listening and attention opportunities into continuous provision (e.g. a listening area, musical instruments), not just adult-led sessions.

Build sustained shared thinking into story time and role play by preparing open-ended questions in advance.
Sequence sessions so key vocabulary is introduced, modelled and then revisited across the day (e.g. in songs, stories and play).
Plan opportunities for children to answer in full sentences and prepare a model sentence to scaffold this, e.g. "I think... because...".
Consider how the outdoor environment can be used to extend children's speaking and listening, e.g. through den building talk or narrated small-world play.

Adapting planning and teaching to ensure that individual needs are met Next Steps:

Plan how you will adapt your language and vocabulary teaching for children with EAL, e.g. using visual supports, key words in home language, or additional modelling time.
Consider strategies to support children with speech, language and communication needs, e.g. simplified instructions, visual timetables, extra processing time.
Identify how you will extend vocabulary and language opportunities for children who are confident communicators.

Pupil progress in this lesson and use of assessment (including questioning) Next Steps:

Use open-ended questioning during play to assess understanding, rather than relying on closed questions with one right answer.
Identify a small group of focus children each session and note examples of their listening, understanding or speaking against Development Matters age bands.
Consider how you assess and value the progress of children learning English as an additional language, including progress in their home language.

Comments about student teacher's developing Subject Knowledge and Pedagogy Next Steps:

Develop secure knowledge of the three strands of Communication and Language (Listening and Attention, Understanding, Speaking) so each planned activity has a clear rationale.
Extend your own modelling of vocabulary by deliberately introducing and repeating new words across a range of contexts through the day.
Read the relevant age-band guidance in Development Matters/Birth to 5 Matters to secure understanding of typical progression in communication and language.

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Birth-to-5-Matters-Doc-LINKS.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

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- Mathers, S. (2025), 'Communication and Language', in Grenier, J. and Vollans, C., *Putting the EYFS Curriculum into Practice*, Sage, pp. 27-42
- Palmer, S. (2024) *Foundations of literacy: Communication, language and literacy from birth to five* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Whitebread, D. & Coltman, P. (2015), *Teaching and Learning in the Early Years*. Routledge