**Language for learning:**

**A checklist for language difficulties (Primary level)**

**Student’s Name:** Click or tap here to enter name.

**Date of Birth:** Click or tap here to enter date.

**School:** Click or tap here to enter school.

**Year Level:** Click or tap here to enter year level.

**Completed by:** Click or tap here to enter name.

**Date Completed:** Click or tap here to enter date.

**Before using this checklist**

In the first instance, teachers should make evidence-based classroom adjustments across all subject areas and learning tasks (see below classroom adjustments). This will support **all** learners’ language development, especially those with language difficulties.

[General Expressive Language Classroom Adjustments](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/learningneeds/General_Expressive_Language_Classroom_Adjustments.DOCX)

[General Receptive Language Classroom Adjustments](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/learningneeds/General_Receptive_Language_Classroom_Adjustments.DOCX)

If a student continues to experience difficulties despite these adjustments, the teacher should investigate further:

1. Use the [What does a language difficulty look like in the classroom](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/learningneeds/What_a_language_difficulty_looks_like_in_the_classroom.DOCX) resource with this checklist (page 3) to help build a language profile of the student.
2. Then use this profile to identify the skill areas where the student has difficulties and increase the use of classroom adjustments to support them in these areas.

**Things to consider when using this checklist**

This checklist (page 3) is designed to enable teachers, parents, psychologists and other professionals to identify students who may have language learning difficulties. The features described may be signs of a language difficulty.

This checklist covers a wide age range. Some items **MAY NOT** be applicable to the student’s age or grade level. When completing the checklist, consider the student’s communication behaviours in relation to their same-aged peers. In other words, is the same behaviour typical of other students of the same age and expected for their age or different from their peers and potentially a sign of a difficulty.

Consider each description carefully and mark those that are **consistent features** of the student’s communication behaviour. In other words, the student experiences these on most days and with most tasks rather than occasionally in tasks that would challenge many same-aged peers.

Remember that language difficulties affect every individual differently, and there are many ways language problems may present and evolve over time.

There is no target number of items a student needs to ‘tick’ to have difficulty with language. A student may have difficulty across all the areas of the checklist or may have difficulty in a few areas.

It is important to also collect the student’s views on their strengths and areas of challenge with language. You could ask the student:

* How do you feel about listening in class? Are there times that you find this easier / harder? What do these times look like?
* What things help you to remember instructions? (Offer suggestions: When I write instructions on the board, when I show you how to do something?).
* What talking activities do you enjoy in class (e.g. small group tasks, whole-group activities etc.)? Are there ones you find harder and what is hard about these?

**Use the checklist to support further investigation**

Consider a referral to a speech pathologist and use the data and information collected from the checklist to support this discussion. The wellbeing coordinator / assistant principal and the student’s parents should be included in the discussion. A speech pathologist can:

* define and describe the difficulty in more depth
* decide about the developmental appropriateness of the observed features
* suggest more strategies and practical activities for the classroom and home.

**SEE CHECKLIST ON NEXT PAGE**

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| PRIMARY LEVEL CHECKLIST |
| **Behaviour** |
| is inattentive and restless in listening situations; may tire easily and ‘tune out’ at times  has difficulty attending and listening in a noisy environment  distracts other children and / or uses attention-seeking behaviours  needs constant assistance or direction from an adult to complete a task  needs extra time to respond verbally and to organise answers  becomes frustrated when communicating (e.g., says ‘You know what I mean’ or ‘It doesn’t matter’)  waits to observe other children before responding  is quiet and does not draw attention to self in class  rushes in impulsively, seemingly ‘without thinking’  has difficulty getting themselves organised (e.g., forgets homework, loses jumper, arrives late)  organisational routines, usually learned quickly by peers, need explicit explanation (e.g., timetable routines and changes) |
| **Verbal memory / sequencing** |
| poor retention of words in nursery rhymes, songs etc.  has difficulty remembering sequences of auditory information (e.g., the alphabet, days of the week, 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., ‘Before you go out to play, eat your lunch’)  has difficulty retelling events in a cohesive and sequential manner (e.g., weekend news, holiday retell) |
| **Comprehension** |
| has difficulty understanding questions (e.g., what, when, where, why, how etc.)  misunderstands instructions or information that involve specific concepts (e.g., before, many, second) or complex sentence forms. For example, ‘Simon was pushed by the girl’ is more difficult to comprehend than ‘The girl pushed Simon’.  has difficulty integrating auditory information (e.g., getting the joke or riddle)  misinterprets indirect requests and subtle remarks (e.g., ‘I want to hear a pin drop’, ‘Pull up your socks’)  fails to fully comprehend stories as a whole (i.e., drawing conclusions, predicting outcomes and understanding implied meanings)  has a narrow or literal understanding of word meanings, which interferes with the understanding of jokes and puns (e.g., ‘What type of shoes do koalas wear? Gum boots’)  has difficulty understanding idioms, similes and metaphors (e.g., ‘as quiet as a mouse’) |
| **Expressive language / story telling** |
| demonstrates immature grammar or incorrect word order (e.g., ‘They **goed** to the movies’, ‘The cat chased two mouse**s**’)  speaks in short sentences and may rely on well-practised sentence forms  has difficulty giving instructions for games or directions to an exact location  stories can be disjointed or poorly sequenced, often missing important details about the setting, characters or events  has difficulty providing key points relevant to a topic  has a lot to say but lacks specific detail, leaving the listener confused; has difficulty getting to the point when explaining something |
| **Word retrieval / vocabulary** |
| uses non-specific words (e.g., sort of, stuff, junk, thing, there, that)  has trouble finding the exact word (e.g., may call a ‘stamp’ a ‘label’ or ‘sticker’)  speech is hesitant, filled with pauses or numerous ‘ums’, repetitions or rewording  often uses gesture to assist communication  has poor memory for names of people or objects  vocabulary lacks variety (e.g., uses good to mean – polite, happy, kind, friendly) |
| **Social communication / pragmatics** |
| has difficulty understanding and using playground language (e.g., describing the rules of a game, asking someone to join in, disagreeing with a peer)  has difficulty interpreting social cues (e.g., facial expressions, body language, tone of voice)  tends to play alone or with younger children  initiates conversation less often than peers and/or seldom contributes to group discussions  has difficulty with the rules of games and conversation such as taking turns, staying on topic and indicating when he/she has not understood |
| **Saying complex words** |
| finds it hard to say words of several syllables (e.g., ‘psgetti’ for ‘spaghetti’; ‘cimmanon’ for ‘cinnamon’ or swaps sounds in adjacent words, e.g., ‘the cown clame’ for ‘the clown came’)  is easily confused by tongue twisters  shows persistent articulation errors (e.g., fursday/Thursday; lellow/yellow; wed/red) |
| **Sound awareness** |
| is unable to make up a list of rhyming words (e.g., cat, fat …)  has difficulty analysing spoken words into syllables (e.g., caterpillar 🡪 cat + ter + pill + ar) or sounds (climb 🡪 c + l + i + mb)  finds it hard to learn sounds and letter names (e.g., the letter name for ‘m’ is ‘em’, but the sound says ‘mmmm’)  confuses similar sounding words in speech or writing (e.g., cone/comb; speech/peach; manila folder/vanilla folder) |
| **Student voice** |
| Click to add student’s views on their strengths and challenges |
| **Any other information** |
| It is helpful to think about the student’s talking, reading and writing skills in different situations (e.g., school, playground, home):  Click to add any relevant background, assessment findings, observations or relevant information |
| **Please consider** |
| Was there a delay in onset and/or development of language?  Is there a history of ear problems, e.g., middle ear infections?  Has hearing and vision been tested?  Is there a family history of speech and/or language/learning difficulty?  Are there any other diagnosed difficulties (e.g., autism, ADHD)?  Is English the student’s first language?  Is the student having difficulty with literacy development?  Is there a history of poor attendance at school? |

**Acknowledgement**

This checklist was originally developed by speech pathologists from the Language Learning Disability – Special Interest Group (Victoria) and OzChild Education Services. Adaptations have been made by the Department of Education, following consultation and approval from OzChild. This checklist may be copied and used in schools.