

Receptive Language (Listening)

The ability to listen and to comprehend spoken language is a basic skill that enables to students to learn and participate in the classroom. Students with receptive language difficulties experience major challenges when it comes to listening and understanding what they are hearing. This may be due to a variety of reasons, including:

LANGUAGE DELAY OR DISORDER	OTHER FACTORS
Gaps or delays in vocabulary and basic concept development	Auditory Attention: maintaining attention while teacher is talking
Difficulty understanding certain sentence structures , such as questions and passive construction (e.g. <i>The boy was seen by the girl.</i>)	Auditory Memory: retaining information that is presented only in the spoken modality
Difficulty understanding story or paragraph level information due to a combination of vocabulary delay and difficulty understanding sentence structures and their connections.	Auditory Processing: the student is able to hear speech sounds with normal acuity, but the sounds associated with speech and language are not being processed effectively by the speech-language centers in the brain.
Difficulty in the social aspects of listening: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looking at the speaker; • interpreting facial expression, body language and voice tone 	Attention: the student may have difficulty listening that is associated with ADD or ADHD. In this case the student has difficulty attending and staying on task, not only when listening to language, but in other contexts as well.
	Second Language Learning: The first stage of second language learning is listening comprehension. This is a process that normally takes up to two years for social language matery and up to seven years for academic language mastery.

A student may present with any of the above difficulties in isolation or in combination. For example, some students may only have difficulty with auditory attention. Other students, such as those with autism spectrum disorders, may be affected by many of the elements listed above.

The following are signs that a student does not understand what he/she is hearing in the classroom, particularly when they are observed **consistently**:

- The student has difficulty following instructions. The student produces work that is not completed correctly.
- The student does not answer questions correctly and on topic, and/or does not participate in classroom discussions.
- The student seems to be daydreaming or is frequently off-task.

- The student is frequently asking for repetition.

While some students may be aware that they are having difficulty, many others are not conscious of their difficulties, particularly if they've lived with this impairment since birth. While it is easy to feel impatient with these students and attribute their behaviours to lack of care or effort, it is important to understand that they feel intensely frustrated by their listening problems, and often develop feelings of anxiety around being in classroom listening situations. It is important to identify and acknowledge the difficulty and work with the student to compensate for the difficulty.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Classroom teachers may implement a variety of strategies to facilitate listening and comprehension. For example the teacher may:

- Consistently monitor students' comprehension by asking questions from time to time. The kinds of questions that probe for listening comprehension may include any of the following:
 - Short or specific answer: *Mary, what is the name of the planet that is closest to the sun? Alessandro, what are you supposed to do after you put your name on the top of the page?*
 - Sentence completion (or cloze): *Amber, the name of the planet that is closest to the sun is....*
 - Forced choice alternative: *Dylan, which planet is closest to the sun, Mercury or Pluto?*
 - Provide sound cueing if you have a hunch that your student knows the answer, but is having difficulty retrieving the word: *Jackie, the planet that is closest to the sun is M....*

Use whichever question format works best with a particular student. If a student is having listening difficulties, do not assume that this is because he/she has not been listening or doesn't care. Most students are extremely concerned about what other students think about them and are embarrassed when they cannot answer a question correctly. Simply provide the answer and move on.

- Be animated. Avoid speaking in a monotone. Vary your rate of speech. Speak more slowly and concisely when you are wishing to emphasize important information. This will tell your students when it is really important to listen intently.
- Introduce each new topic to allow your student to prepare him or herself for the information that is coming. Use phrasing and pausing to break information into obvious parts. Repeat and emphasize key points. Tell your class which information is really important to remember and study.

- Link new information to previously taught, as well as to associated concepts, whenever appropriate. This will help students contextualize the subject material and learn it in a more holistic manner, rather than in bits and pieces.
- Accompany spoken language with visuals (pictures, objects, printed information) as much as is practically possible.
- Provide a model of the expected product for your students to examine.
- Make lessons interactive whenever possible. The SmartBoard is a terrific tool to use for this purpose. Don't forget that you have kinesthetic and/or tactile learners in your class who will appreciate the opportunity to **do something** in addition to listening.
- For secondary students, provide a set of notes or assign a peer note taker. Many teachers have students fill in the blanks on a prepared set of notes and find that this greatly facilitates listening attention. Students may also be provided with graphic organizers. For example, a Venn diagram may be used in the context of a lecture that has a compare/contrast structure.
- Provide an environment where students feel comfortable asking for repetition or explanation. If you don't have time to repeat or explain during class time, ask the student(s) to come see you later. For older students, you may supply a question box where students may deposit their questions in writing.
- Pause regularly to have students break into pairs or small groups and discuss newly-learned information with each other. Alternatively have students explain the information to the whole group. Research has shown that this is the most effective way to retain newly learned material....explain it to someone!!!
- Allow students to get up and move a little every 20 minutes. Everyone, including you, needs to get your blood circulating at regular intervals.
- Keep those who have difficulty with listening and comprehending near the front of the class so that you can monitor them more closely.

Additional measures to alleviate listening challenges include FM Systems and Sound Field Systems. Both of these technologies amplify the teacher's voice, making it less challenging for the student to filter out background noises. An FM System is worn by an individual student, while a Sound Field System serves the whole class.

It is important to be aware that students with any or all of the difficulties listed previously tend to develop the habit of keeping quiet. They rarely, if ever, put up their hands to answer questions and

they tend to sit at the back of the class. They may become chronically inattentive because of the extraordinary effort required to take in all of the information you are delivering to them verbally. They may be too embarrassed to continuously put up their hands when they do not understand.

Other students with listening or comprehension difficulties may act out in order to distract themselves, their teacher and their peers. The positive or negative attention they get from this acting out behaviour serves to deflect from the fact that they are not able to follow what's going on in the classroom. Many of these students end up being diagnosed with "behaviour problems." Consequently, it is not uncommon for these students to pass through many years of schooling without anyone ever noticing that they are not understanding spoken language. It can be tricky for educators, including speech-language pathologists, to figure out what is really going on.

Finally, if you have concerns about a student's listening skills, it is important to have his/her **hearing** tested to rule out hearing loss as a contributing factor if this has not already been done. Hearing acuity can be screened by a nurse. If the nurse detects a hearing loss, the student may then be referred to an audiologist for a more comprehensive hearing evaluation. Other factors contributing to the ability to listen and understand are the student's mental and physical state. If your student is frequently agitated, tired and hungry in class, this is sure to have an impact on the ability to focus energy on sustained listening. It is important to pay attention to these other issues as well as those mentioned earlier.

Online Speech-Language Resources for Teachers

The speech-language pathologists of the English Montreal School Board have compiled a list of online resources that provide quality information about instructional and/or intervention practices that address the needs of students with speech and language challenges. These websites are not listed in any particular order. You are encouraged to explore them with a view to choosing the ones that serve your particular needs. The lists will be updated on an ongoing basis, so keep visiting our site!

ONLINE SPEECH AND LANGUAGE RESOURCES

General Language	http://www.speechlanguage-resources.com/ http://www.languageisheartosay.com/resources/ http://www.speech2teach.com.com/p1.htm http://www.teachersites.schoolworld.com/webpages/TSantore-Goodman/index.cfm http://www.speech-language-therapy.com/ http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/Parent/Directory/Free%20Resources%20for%20Professionals.aspx http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster2/spttherapy.html http://www.minedu.govt.nz/~media/MinEdu/Files/EducationSectors/SpecialE
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	ducation/PublicationsResources/MuchMoreThanWordsFA5.pdf
Language Difficulties at the Secondary Level	http://www.speech-language-therapy.com/pdf/aPatchellHand1993.pdf
Social Language	http://www.jillkuzma.wordpress.com
Second Language Acquisition	http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/second.htm
Website for emergent language development (toddler level)	www.teachmetotalk.com N.B. Although this website targets early language development, the information and strategies may also be applied to young school-age children with severe or profound language delays.
List of 100 best websites in the area of speech-language	http://www.onlinespeechpathologyprograms.net/speech-sites/
Speech-Language Therapy Materials (many can be adapted for classroom use)	http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster2/sptherapy.html