



# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The development of children’s early language skills is critically important for their future academic success. Language development indicators reflect a child’s ability to understand increasingly complex language (receptive language skills), a child’s increasing proficiency when expressing ideas (expressive language skills), and a child’s growing understanding of and ability to follow appropriate social and conversational rules. The components within this domain address receptive and expressive language, pragmatics,<sup>17</sup> and English language development specific to dual language learners.

As a growing number of children live in households where the primary spoken language is not English, this domain also addresses the language development of dual language learners. Unlike most of the other progressions in this document, however, specific age thresholds do not define the indicators for English language development (or for development in any other language). Children who become dual language learners are exposed to their second language for the first time at different ages. As a result, one child may start the process of developing second-language skills at birth and another child may start at four, making the age thresholds inappropriate. So instead of using age, *The Standards* use research-based *stages* to outline a child’s progress in English language development. It is important to note that there is no set time for how long it will take a given child to progress through these stages. Progress depends upon the unique characteristics of the child, his or her exposure to English in the home and other environments, the child’s motivation to learn English, and other factors.

Children with disabilities may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the goals of language development. If a child is deaf or hard of hearing, for example, that child may demonstrate progress through gestures, symbols, pictures, augmentative and alternative communication devices, and/or signs as well as through spoken words. Children with cognitive disabilities may also demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the same goals, often meeting them at a different pace, with a different degree of accomplishment, and in a different order than typically developing children. When observing how children demonstrate what they know and can do, the full spectrum of communication options—including the use of American Sign Language and other low- and high-technology augmentative/assistive communication systems—should be considered. However, the goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least restrictive and most inclusive approach to developing environments and curricula that best support the language development of all children.

**Remember:** While this domain represents general expectations for language development, each child will reach the individual learning goals at his or her own pace and in his or her own way.

LD 1: Receptive Language

LD 3: Pragmatics

LD 2: Expressive Language

LD 4: Language Development of Dual Language Learners





# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

## Component 1: Receptive Language

**Learning Goal 1.a:** Young children attend to, understand, and respond to increasingly complex language.

By the following ages, most children will:

9m



- › Turn toward familiar voices or sounds
- › Recognize more than one tone of voice in adults and respond with body movement and sounds
- › Demonstrate a recognition of names of familiar people and favorite objects
- › Respond to voices and sounds in the environment
- › Can be quieted by a calm, familiar voice
- › Become excited upon hearing familiar words, such as “nursing” or “bottle”
- › Startle or cry when there is a loud sound

18m



- › Look at what an adult is pointing to and share attention
- › Identify familiar people or objects when prompted
- › Understand more words than they can say
- › Respond appropriately to familiar words, signs, and songs
- › Follow simple, one-step directions, especially if accompanied by adult gestures (e.g., “stop” or “come here”)

24m



- › Understand approximately 200 words (receptive language)
- › Follow one-step directions with few adult gestures (e.g., responding to an adult saying, “Please lift your arms.”)

36m



- › Demonstrate an understanding of descriptive words
- › Respond appropriately to others’ comments, questions, or stories
- › Follow two-step directions that involve familiar experiences and objects (e.g., “Find your shoes and bring them to me.”)

48m



- › Demonstrate an understanding of stories, songs, and poems by retelling or relating them to prior knowledge
- › Demonstrate an understanding of conversations by responding to questions and prompts
- › Demonstrate an understanding of several hundred words in their home language, including those relating to objects, actions, and attributes encountered in both real and symbolic contexts (conversations and texts)
- › Distinguish between real and made-up words
- › Understand increasingly longer and complex sentences, including sentences with two or more phrases or ideas
- › Follow directions that involve multiple steps (e.g., “Please, would you get the sponge, dampen it with water, and clean your table top?”)

60m



- › Demonstrate an understanding of complex statements, questions, and stories containing multiple phrases and ideas
- › Respond appropriately to a specific and varied vocabulary
- › Follow detailed, multi-step directions (e.g., “Put away your toys, wash your hands, and come to the table.”)



# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

## Component 2: Expressive Language

**Learning Goal 2.a:** Young children use increasingly complex vocabulary, grammar, and syntax to express thoughts and needs.

By the following ages, most children will:

9m



- › Experiment with making sounds
- › Engage in babbling (i.e., making consonant sounds followed by a vowel sound)
- › Say “mama” and “dada”
- › Use vocalizations, gestures, and facial expressions to communicate needs and wants and to express interest or dislike

18m



- › Communicate in a way that is understood by most familiar people (e.g., eye glances, gestures, sounds)
- › Produce some words and word-like sounds
- › Use eight to ten individual words to communicate wants, needs, interests, and dislikes
- › Combine words and gestures to communicate
- › Use short, telegraphic phrases (of one or two words) to communicate wants, needs, and thoughts
- › Use some pronouns

24m



- › Communicate basic needs in a way that is understood by many people outside the family or child care
- › Use “please” and “thank you”
- › Combine words with gestures and expressions (cues) to ensure adults understand their desires or requests (e.g., pointing to the door and saying, “Go outside.”)
- › Hold one-sided conversations with stuffed animals and dolls
- › Start to use the plural forms of nouns and verbs
- › Start to use the past tense of verbs

36m



- › Communicate basic ideas in a way that is understood by most people
- › Use a vocabulary of more than 100 words in their home language (words, signs, and/or alternative communication), including words for familiar people, objects, and animals and words that describe (adjectives)
- › Expand their vocabulary by asking others to name unfamiliar objects
- › Use two- and some three-syllable words
- › Combine words into simple three- to four-word sentences
- › Use simple adjectives in statements (“big,” “little,” “hard,” “soft”)

48m



- › Communicate clearly enough to be understood by unfamiliar listeners but may make some pronunciation errors
- › Pronounce new, long, or unusual words if they have modeling and support
- › Use a variety of vocabulary words, including words to express emotions, to talk about position and direction, to describe relations between objects, to describe actions, and to express needs
- › Demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of words by describing the use of familiar objects, talking about categories of objects, using several words to explain the same idea (i.e., synonyms), and relating words to their opposites
- › Determine, with modeling and support, the meanings of unknown words by asking questions or using contextual clues, such as pictures that accompany text
- › Experiment with using new words in conversation

60m



- › Communicate clearly enough to be understood by unfamiliar listeners, with few pronunciation errors
- › Expand their vocabulary with words of increasing specificity and variety
- › Demonstrate an increasing knowledge of the meanings of words and skill in determining the meaning of unknown words
- › Use increasingly complex, longer sentences, including sentences that combine two or three phrases

*Continued*

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*Continued*



# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

## Component 2: Expressive Language

**Learning Goal 2.a:** Young children use increasingly complex vocabulary, grammar, and syntax to express thoughts and needs.

Continued from previous:

**9m**

*See previous*

**18m**

*See previous*

**24m**

*See previous*

**36m**

*Continued from previous*

- › Use simple adverbs in statements (e.g., “That car goes very fast!”)
- › Use some plurals appropriately (e.g., distinguishing between “car” and “cars”)
- › Ask “who,” “what,” “why,” and “where” questions

**48m**

*Continued from previous*

- › Use longer, more increasingly complex sentences, including complete four- to six-word sentences
- › Use, with modeling and support, more complex grammar and parts of speech, including common prepositions, regular plural nouns, correct subject- verb agreement, pronouns, and possessives
- › Continue to ask “who,” “what,” “why,” and “where” questions

**60m**

*Continued from previous*

- › Use more complex grammar and parts of speech, including prepositions, regular and irregular plural forms of nouns, correct subject-verb agreement, pronouns, possessives, and regular and irregular past tense verbs



# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

## Component 3: Pragmatics\*

**Learning Goal 3.a:** Young children understand, follow, and use appropriate social and conversational rules.

\* "... pragmatics is the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. Communicative action includes not only speech acts—such as requesting, greeting, and so on—but also participation in conversation, engaging in different types of discourse, and sustaining interaction in complex speech events." (Kasper, 1997)

By the following ages, most children will:

9m



- › Respond to the speech of others by looking toward the speaker
- › Initiate and engage in simple back-and-forth interactions with others by using facial expressions, vocalizations, and gestures
- › Express enjoyment and a desire for "more" through body language (cues), such as kicking their legs, waving their arms, and smiling

18m



- › Respond to others' communication with gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and sounds
- › Communicate vocally or use nonverbal strategies to communicate when interacting with a responsive adult
- › Engage in joint attention by directing their gaze toward what a speaker is looking at or pointing to
- › Point in order to request an object
- › Use body language (cues) such as bobbing their head, raising their eyebrows, smiling, or tilting their head to signal enjoyment or their desire for more of an activity from an adult

24m



- › Participate in simple turn-taking during one-on-one conversations
- › Demonstrate concern for others through gestures and facial expressions
- › Directly interact with adults to signal enjoyment or a desire for more (e.g., by tugging on an adult's pant leg, patting an adult, holding an adult's arm, or verbalizing)

36m



- › Respond to others' statements, prompts, and questions
- › Use multiple means, such as verbal and nonverbal language, to communicate needs, wants, and feelings
- › Use social conventions to initiate and sustain exchanges of communication
- › Demonstrate an understanding of simple humor

48m



- › Demonstrate an understanding of nonverbal cues (e.g., eye contact, distance from partner, and facial expressions) and the ability to use them
- › Use appropriate volume and intonation when speaking in a variety of social situations
- › Follow commonly accepted norms of communication in group settings, with support and modeling (e.g., responding appropriately to such direction as "Only one child speaks at once; raise your hand.")
- › Engage, with support and modeling, in conversations of at least three turns, with each exchange relating to and building upon what was said previously

60m



- › Follow commonly accepted norms of communication in group settings with increasing independence (e.g., responding appropriately to such direction as "Only one child speaks at once; raise your hand.")
- › Engage, with support and modeling, in conversations of at least five turns, with each exchange relating to and building upon what was said previously
- › Use language to communicate with others in familiar and unfamiliar social situations for a variety of purposes



# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

**Component 4:** Language Development of Dual Language Learners  
**Learning Goal 4.a:** Young children attend to, understand, and respond to increasingly complex language as well as a range of topics and types of texts (including digital texts) in English.

## In early-stage English language development, children:



- › Demonstrate an understanding of age-appropriate language usage related to conversational as well as basic and advanced concepts in the home language but will not know all the same words in their home language and in English
- › Attend to English oral language in both real and pretend activities, relying on the intonation, facial expressions, or gestures of the speaker in the same way that they attend to their home oral language
- › Begin to attend to and participate in English language small- and large-group activities, such as circle time, storybook reading, etc.
- › Begin to follow simple directions in English, especially when they are accompanied by contextual cues, such as gestures, pointing, and voice modulation

## In mid-stage English language development, children:



- › Make progress in their home language
- › Demonstrate an understanding of English words for objects and actions and of English phrases encountered frequently in both real and pretend activities
- › Demonstrate an understanding of English words related to basic concepts (e.g., colors, some animal classifications, foods, etc.)
- › Respond appropriately to requests in English that involve one-step directions (e.g., “clean up”) when personally directed by others (these requests may occur with or without contextual cues)

## In late-stage English language development, children:



- › Demonstrate an understanding of a larger set of words in English (for objects and actions, personal pronouns, and possessives) in both real and pretend activities
- › Demonstrate an understanding of words in English related to more advanced concepts (e.g., abstract emotions and ideas)
- › Follow directions that involve a one- or two-step sequence, relying less on contextual cues

**Note:** Unlike most of the other developmental progressions in this document, the indicators for English language development (or for development in any other language) do not follow specific age thresholds. Children who become dual language learners are exposed to their second language for the first time at different ages. As a result, one child may start the process of developing English language skills at birth and another child may start at age four, making the age thresholds inappropriate. So instead of using age, *The Standards* use research-based *stages* to outline a child’s progress in English language development. It is important to note that there is no set time for how long it will take a given child to progress through these *stages*. Progress depends upon the unique characteristics of the child, his or her exposure to English in the home and other environments, the child’s motivation to learn English, and other factors.





# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

**Component 4:** Language Development of Dual Language Learners  
**Learning Goal 4.b:** Young children become increasingly proficient in expressing their thoughts and ideas in English.

## In early-stage English language development, children:



- › Use nonverbal communication, such as gestures or behaviors, to seek attention, request objects, or initiate a response from others
- › Use age-appropriate vocabulary in the home language
- › Listen and converse in their home language
- › Use age-appropriate grammar in their home language
- › Ask a variety of questions (e.g., “what,” “why,” “how,” “when,” and “where”) in their home language
- › Use simple English expressions that are phonetically correct but may be inappropriate to the context of the conversation or the situation (pragmatically inappropriate; e.g., missing social, contextual, or self-referential cues)

## In mid-stage English language development, children:



- › Combine nonverbal with some verbal communication to be understood by others
- › Codeswitch (insert a home language word into an English sentence to get the point across when they don’t know the word in English)
- › Use telegraphic speech (two-word phrases rather than full sentences, such as “want food”)
- › Use formulaic speech (expressions that are learned whole, e.g., “I don’t know”)
- › Use English vocabulary that mainly consists of concrete nouns and some verbs and pronouns
- › Converse with others in English using two or three words at a time but switch back and forth between English and their home language
- › Use some English grammatical markers (e.g., “-ing” or the plural-forming “-s”) and apply at times the rules of grammar of the home language to English
- › Use “what” and “why” questions in English, sometimes with errors

## In late-stage English language development, children:



- › Demonstrate increasing reliance on verbal communication in English to be understood by others
- › Use new English vocabulary to share knowledge of concepts, including conversational and academic vocabulary
- › Sustain a conversation in English with increasingly complex syntax, adding conjunctions, subject-verb-object patterns, and other more advanced elements of English sentence construction
- › Expand their use of different forms of grammar in English (e.g., plurals; possessive pronouns; simple past-tense verbs), sometimes with errors
- › Use “what,” “why,” “how,” “when,” and “where” questions in more complete forms in English, sometimes with errors

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