

FOR SLPS

Informal Speech and Language Screener

Informal screening tool only. Not standardized, not normed, not diagnostic. Six age bands - 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 plus - each with articulation, language and phonological awareness probes drawn from this site's own word lists and worksheets.



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Informal Speech and Language Screener

A structured set of things to listen for at each age, drawn from this site's own word lists, worksheets and awareness tasks. Use it to decide whether a full evaluation is warranted.

READ THIS FIRST



This screener has no norms, no standard scores and no cut-offs, and it has not been validated against any standardized measure. It cannot diagnose a speech or language disorder and it cannot rule one out. It is a prompt for clinical judgment: a structured way to listen to a child for ten minutes and decide whether a full evaluation is warranted. A child who sails through it can still have a disorder, and a child who struggles with it may simply be tired, shy, or unfamiliar with the examiner. Nothing here substitutes for a comprehensive assessment by a certified speech-language pathologist.

How to use it

- Work through the band for the child's age. If they struggle early, drop to the band below; if they breeze through, move up.
- Model each target once. This is a screening probe, not teaching - resist the urge to cue, because what you want to know is what the child does unaided.
- For articulation, listen to the whole word, not just the target sound. Note the position of the error and whether it is consistent.
- Score nothing. Note what you heard. The referral guidance at the end of each band is a prompt to think, not a cut-off to apply.
- Ten minutes is plenty. If you find yourself needing longer, you have already learned what you needed to know: this child warrants a full evaluation.

2 years

INFORMAL SCREENING ONLY

Child: _____ Date: _____ Age: _____

What to expect: Around 50 or more words and the beginnings of two-word combinations. About half of what they say is understood by someone outside the family.

Speech sounds 14 WORDS

P Sound /p/	pig · pan	☐	☐	☐
B Sound /b/	ball · bat	☐	☐	☐
M Sound /m/	man · moon	☐	☐	☐
D Sound /d/	dog · duck	☐	☐	☐
N Sound /n/	no · nose	☐	☐	☐
H Sound /h/	hat · house	☐	☐	☐
W Sound /w/	watch · wet	☐	☐	☐

Language 6 ITEMS

Present Progressive Verbs

- The boy is ____ a book. (read) (reading)
- The dog is ____ in the yard. (run) (running)
- The baby is ____ in the crib. (sleep) (sleeping)

Regular Plurals

- One cat, two ____ . (cats)
- One dog, two ____ . (dogs)
- One book, three ____ . (books)

Phonological awareness: Pre-awareness

Formal phonological awareness is not expected at 2. Instead, note whether the child enjoys and attends to rhyming books, songs and finger plays, and whether they join in on repeated lines.

Also listen for

- ☐ Does the child combine two words at all ("more juice", "daddy go")?
- ☐ Do they use words to request, or mostly gesture and lead by the hand?

- ☐ Do they respond to their name and follow a simple one-step direction?
- ☐ Is there a range of consonants, or does nearly everything start with the same one or two sounds?

**CONSIDER REFERRING FOR FULL EVALUATION IF**

Fewer than 50 words, no two-word combinations, very few different consonants, or a parent reporting that almost nobody outside the household understands the child. Any loss of words previously used warrants immediate referral. This is a prompt for clinical judgement, not a cut-off score - there are no norms behind it.

NOTES

3 years

INFORMAL SCREENING ONLY

Child: _____ Date: _____ Age: _____

What to expect: Three-word sentences, several hundred words, and roughly three-quarters of speech understood by an unfamiliar listener.

Speech sounds 18 WORDS

T Sound /t/	top · toe	☐	☐	☐
K Sound /k/	cat · cup	☐	☐	☐
G Sound /g/	go · girl	☐	☐	☐
NG Sound /ng/	singer · finger	☐	☐	☐
F Sound /f/	fish · fan	☐	☐	☐
Y Sound /j/	yes · you	☐	☐	☐
P Sound /p/	pig · pan	☐	☐	☐
B Sound /b/	ball · bat	☐	☐	☐
M Sound /m/	man · moon	☐	☐	☐

Language 12 ITEMS

Past Tense Verbs

- Today I walk to school. Yesterday I ____ to school. (walk) (walked)
- Today I jump on the bed. Yesterday I ____ on the bed. (jump) (jumped)
- Today I play outside. Yesterday I ____ outside. (play) (played)

Prepositions

- The cat is ____ the box. (inside it) (in)
- The book is ____ the table. (on top) (on)
- The ball is ____ the bed. (beneath it) (under)

WH-Questions

- The girl is eating an apple. What is she eating? (An apple)
- The dog is sleeping on the rug. Where is the dog sleeping? (On the rug)
- Mom is driving the car. What is Mom driving? (The car)

Subject Pronouns

- My brother is on the swing. ____ is swinging high. (He)
- Mom is in the kitchen. ____ is making lunch. (She)
- The twins are at the park. ____ are playing tag. (They)

Phonological awareness: Rhyme recognition

Say two words and ask whether they rhyme. Recognition comes well before production at this age, so accept a yes/no rather than expecting the child to generate a rhyme.

-op: top, drop, pop, chop undefined -en: ten, when, then, men -oy: toy, boy, joy

Also listen for

- ☐ Are sentences three words or longer, at least some of the time?
- ☐ Can they answer simple what and where questions about the here and now?
- ☐ Does /k/ or /g/ come out as /t/ or /d/ (fronting)? This is still common but should be resolving.
- ☐ Are word endings present, or falling off ("cu" for "cup")?



CONSIDER REFERRING FOR FULL EVALUATION IF

Speech an unfamiliar listener finds mostly unintelligible, no sentences beyond two words, no answers to simple WH-questions, or final consonants missing across the board. This is a prompt for clinical judgement, not a cut-off score - there are no norms behind it.

NOTES

4 years

INFORMAL SCREENING ONLY

Child: _____ Date: _____ Age: _____

What to expect: Four- and five-word sentences, and speech an unfamiliar listener understands nearly all of the time even if some sounds are still wrong.

Speech sounds 21 WORDS

V Sound /v/	van · vase · vest	☐	☐	☐
S Sound /s/	sun · sock · soap	☐	☐	☐
Z Sound /z/	zoo · zip · zoom	☐	☐	☐
SH Sound /sh/	shoe · ship · shark	☐	☐	☐
CH Sound /ch/	chair · cheese · chin	☐	☐	☐
J Sound /j/	jump · jar · juice	☐	☐	☐
L Sound /l/	love · leg · light	☐	☐	☐

Language 12 ITEMS

Irregular Plurals

- One foot, two ____ . (feet)
- One tooth, many ____ . (teeth)
- One man, three ____ . (men)

Third Person Singular -s

- I ride a bike. My sister ____ a bike too. (ride) (rides)
- We eat lunch at noon. Dad ____ lunch at noon. (eat) (eats)
- They play outside. My brother ____ outside. (play) (plays)

Is, Am, Are: Copula and Auxiliary

- The soup ____ hot. (is)
- I ____ six years old. (am)
- My shoes ____ muddy. (are)

Spatial Concepts

- The cat is sleeping ____ the bed. (not on top - below it) (under)

- The book is ____ the shelf. (resting on top) (on)
- The milk is ____ the fridge. (inside) (in)

Phonological awareness: Syllable counting and rhyme production

Clap the syllables in a word together, then ask the child to do one alone. Then ask for a word that rhymes with a given word - production, not just recognition, is reasonable to probe by 4.

van (1) very (2) video (3) vacation day (4)

Also listen for

- ☐ Is the child intelligible to you as an unfamiliar listener, across the whole session?
- ☐ Are /s/ and /z/ present, even if distorted? Are they coming out sideways (lateral) or through the teeth?
- ☐ Do they tell a short connected story, or just label what they see?
- ☐ Are grammatical endings - plural -s, past -ed, third person -s - present in connected speech?



CONSIDER REFERRING FOR FULL EVALUATION IF

Velar fronting, stopping of f, v, s or z, final consonant deletion or prevocalic voicing still present, sound errors a listener notices immediately, sentences still limited to three words, or a child who avoids talking to unfamiliar people. This is a prompt for clinical judgement, not a cut-off score - there are no norms behind it.

NOTES

5 years

INFORMAL SCREENING ONLY

Child: _____ Date: _____ Age: _____

What to expect: Full sentences, connected stories, and speech that is essentially always intelligible. Most sounds correct, with /r/ and /th/ the usual stragglers.

Speech sounds 12 WORDS

R Sound /r/	red · run · rain	☐	☐	☐
Voiced TH Sound /th/	the · this · that	☐	☐	☐
ZH Sound /zh/	measure · treasure · Asia	☐	☐	☐
Vocalic R /er/ /ar/ /awr/ /er/ /ir/ /air/	arm	☐	☐	☐

Language 15 ITEMS

Object Pronouns

- My brother wants the ball. Throw it to _____. (him)
- Mom is waiting. Give the note to _____. (her)
- The twins are hungry. Make lunch for _____. (them)

Possessive Pronouns

- My brother lost ____ shoe. (his)
- My sister brushed ____ hair. (her)
- The twins packed ____ backpacks. (their)

Future Tense Verbs

- Tomorrow I ____ to the zoo. (go) (will go)
- Later we ____ pizza for dinner. (eat) (will eat)
- Next week she ____ five years old. (be) (will be)

Quantitative Concepts

- There were six cookies and you ate every one. How many did you eat? (all)
- There were six cookies and you ate two. How many did you eat? (some)
- There were six cookies and you ate zero. How many did you eat? (none)

Following Directions

- Touch your nose. (touches nose)

- Stand up. (stands up)
- Pick up the red block. (picks up red block)

Phonological awareness: Sound blending

Say a word broken into its sounds, one at a time, and ask the child what the word is. Start with two- and three-sound words. Along with letter knowledge, this is one of the strongest predictors of early reading.

ray (r - ay) row (r - oh) red (r - e - d) run (r - uh - n)

Also listen for

- ☐ Is /r/ present in any position, or substituted throughout (w/r)? Vocalic /r/ often lags behind consonantal /r/.
- ☐ Can they follow a two-step direction containing a concept ("before you sit down, touch the door")?
- ☐ Do they use pronouns with correct case, or still say "her did it"?
- ☐ Can they retell a story with a beginning, middle and end?



CONSIDER REFERRING FOR FULL EVALUATION IF

Any phonological process other than gliding or vowelization of /r/, errors on sounds other than /r/, /zh/ and /th/, difficulty following two-step directions, or a child whose sentences are still noticeably simpler than their peers'. This is a prompt for clinical judgement, not a cut-off score - there are no norms behind it.

NOTES

6 years

INFORMAL SCREENING ONLY

Child: _____ Date: _____ Age: _____

What to expect: Every sound but voiceless /th/. /r/ is expected by now; if it is still in error, target it rather than wait. Grammar largely adult-like in everyday speech, and phonological awareness strong enough to support early reading.

Speech sounds 18 WORDS

Voiceless TH Sound /th/ thumb · think · thin

☐ ☐ ☐

R Sound /r/ red · run · rain

☐ ☐ ☐

Vocalic R /er/ /ar/ /awr/ /ea/ /ir/ /aich · arm

☐ ☐ ☐

BL Blend /bl/ blue · black · block

☐ ☐ ☐

ST Blend /st/ stop · star · stick

☐ ☐ ☐

TR Blend /tr/ tree · train · truck

☐ ☐ ☐

Language 12 ITEMS

Reflexive Pronouns

- My brother got dressed all by _____. (himself)
- My sister tied her shoes by _____. (herself)
- I poured the milk by _____. (myself)

Subject-Verb Agreement

- The dog ____ at the mailman. (bark) (barks)
- The dogs ____ at the mailman. (bark) (bark)
- My sister ____ to school. (walk) (walks)

Temporal Concepts

- eating the cake / lighting the candles / singing happy birthday (light the candles, sing, eat the cake)
- putting on socks / putting on shoes / tying laces (socks, shoes, laces)
- turning on the water / washing hands / drying hands (water, wash, dry)

Understanding WH-Questions

- Who ate the cookie? (a person)
- Where did you put it? (a place)

- When is your birthday?

(a time)

Phonological awareness: Sound segmenting

Say a word and ask the child to break it into its separate sounds. Three-sound words first, then clusters. Segmenting is harder than blending and is the better probe at this age.

thigh (th - eye) thaw (th - aw) earth (er - th) thumb (th - uh - m)

Also listen for

- ☐ Are consonant clusters produced fully, or reduced ("top" for "stop")?
- ☐ Can the child segment a three-sound word into its phonemes?
- ☐ Is /r/ still in error? At 6 this is worth targeting rather than waiting.
- ☐ Do they use "before" and "after" correctly when the order of mention is reversed?



CONSIDER REFERRING FOR FULL EVALUATION IF

Any sound other than voiceless /th/ still in error, cluster reduction, inability to segment simple words into sounds, or grammatical errors that persist in connected speech. This is a prompt for clinical judgement, not a cut-off score - there are no norms behind it.

NOTES

7 years and older

INFORMAL SCREENING ONLY

Child: _____ Date: _____ Age: _____

What to expect: All sounds mastered, including /r/ and both /th/ sounds. Complex sentences, inferencing, and phoneme-level awareness solid enough for spelling and decoding.

Speech sounds 12 WORDS

R Sound /r/ red · run · rain ☐ ☐ ☐

Vocalic R /er/ /ar/ /awr/ /ea/ /ir/ /air/ /aich/ · arm ☐ ☐ ☐

Voiceless TH Sound /th/ thumb · think · thin ☐ ☐ ☐

Voiced TH Sound /th/ the · this · that ☐ ☐ ☐

Language 12 ITEMS

Making Nouns from Other Words

- Someone who teaches is a _____. (teacher)
- Someone who paints is a _____. (painter)
- Someone who bakes is a _____. (baker)

Modal Helping Verbs

- Birds have wings, so they ____ fly. (can)
- Fish live in water, so they ____ walk on land. (cannot)
- I am too short, so I ____ reach the shelf. (cannot)

Descriptive Concepts

- What color is a banana? (yellow)
- What color is grass? (green)
- What color is the sky on a clear day? (blue)

Following Directions

- Touch your nose. (touches nose)
- Stand up. (stands up)
- Pick up the red block. (picks up red block)

Phonological awareness: Phoneme manipulation

Segmenting, then manipulation: ask the child to say a word without its first sound, or to swap one sound for another. Manipulation is the level that matters for spelling.

ray (r - ay) row (r - oh) red (r - e - d) run (r - uh - n)

Also listen for

- ☐ Any residual sound errors at all? At 7 there is no developmental grace period left.
- ☐ Are multisyllabic words produced with all syllables and the right stress?
- ☐ Can the child answer inferential questions about a short passage, not just factual ones?
- ☐ Do they repair a breakdown when a listener says they did not understand?
- ☐ Is there any word-finding difficulty, or reliance on "thing" and "stuff" in place of specific words?



CONSIDER REFERRING FOR FULL EVALUATION IF

Any sound error, any difficulty segmenting or manipulating phonemes, trouble with inferencing or narrative organization, or word-finding difficulty. Residual errors at this age are unlikely to resolve on their own. This is a prompt for clinical judgement, not a cut-off score - there are no norms behind it.

NOTES