

Expressive language

Expressive language, or 'language output', refers to the use of language and the ability to communicate and interact. These skills include using words to express our thoughts, ideas, wants and needs; developing language in writing; and articulating sounds and social interactions.

Expressive language lets us formulate thoughts by retrieving appropriate vocabulary from our memory stores, recalling speech sounds patterns, and then mentally constructing the sentence according to grammatical rules.

What to do

Use stories with repetitive dialogue, and Shape Coding to teach and reinforce correct grammar.

Pre-teach vocabulary and use mind-maps to develop new vocabulary.

Use sign or gestures to indicate tenses - left hand in front means 'present', right hand in front means 'future' and right hand behind means 'past'.

Repeat the learner's dialogue back to them for clarification, and model correct grammar but do not make them say correctly unless spontaneous.

When to raise a concern

If the learner is unable to express feelings or thoughts, even when talking about something they're interested in, or if their thoughts and ideas are muddled.

If the learner is unable to recall specific vocabulary (known as word-finding difficulties), or if they are unable to learn new words due to a limited vocabulary store.

If they omit auxiliary words, such as the/is, or if they delete word endings, such as -ing, or -ed.

If the learner shows below age-appropriate understanding, or irregular tenses.

If the learner has poor narrative skills, and is unable to construct sentences, use connectives or sequence events.

How to assess

Observation checklists can be accessed through several online organisations, such as The Communication Trust. SENCos can also provide more information on referring to SALT services.