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.

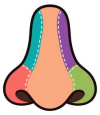
2 years

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/	 nose	 night
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)

Language from a picture: Playing at home

Put this picture in front of the child. Every question below is about it, and the same picture gives you the speech sample for fluency.



UNDERSTANDING - the child points or answers briefly

- Show me the dog. (points to the dog)
- Where is the cat? (points to the cat on the sofa)
- Point to the ball. (points to the ball on the floor by the dog)

TALKING - the child produces the language

- Point to the dog and ask: what is this? ("dog" - a single word is on target here)
- What is the girl lying on her tummy doing? ("drawing", or "draw")
- Tell me about the dog. (any two words together, like "doggy eat")

Following directions

Put two ordinary things on the floor between you - a cup and a ball work well. Say each direction once, then wait. One step is what to expect at this age.

- [ ] Give me the ball. (hands over the ball)
- [ ] Put the cup on the chair. (cup on the chair)
- [ ] Where is the cup? (looks at or points to the cup)

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/	 girl	 game	☐ ☐ —
NG Sound /ng/	 singer	 finger	☐ ☐ —
F Sound /f/	 fish	 fan	☐ ☐ —
Y Sound /j/	 yarn	 yard	☐ ☐ —

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 with my blocks. Yesterday I ____ with my blocks. (play) (played)

Prepositions


The cat is sleeping ____ the sofa. (on)


The two children are ____ the blanket fort. (in)


The crayons are ____ the rug. (on)

WH-Questions


Who ate the cookie? (a person)


Where did you put the ball? (a place)



When is your birthday? (a time)

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)

Language from a picture: At the park

Put this picture in front of the child. Every question below is about it, and the same picture gives you the speech sample for fluency.



UNDERSTANDING - the child points or answers briefly

- Who is flying the kite? (points to the boy with the kite)
- Where is the cat? (under the bench)
- What is the dog doing? (jumping, or catching the frisbee)

TALKING - the child produces the language

- Tell me what the girl on the swing is doing. ("she is swinging" - listen for the -ing)
- How many ducks can you see? (counts, or says "lots of ducks" - listen for the plural)
- Tell me about the girl on the bike. (three or four words together)

Following directions

Two ordinary things on the table - a cup and a ball. Read each direction once, all the way through, before the child moves. Two related steps is what to expect at this age.

- [ ] Pick up the ball and put it in the cup. (both, in order)
- [ ] Give me the cup and then sit down. (both, in order)
- [ ] Put the ball under the chair. (ball under the chair)

Phonological awareness: Rhyme recognition

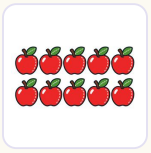
Say two words and ask whether they rhyme. Recognition comes well before production at this age, so accept a yes/no rather than expecting the child to generate a rhyme.



-op: top, drop, pop, chop



toe: toe, though, blow, grow



-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.

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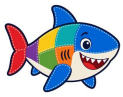
4 years

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	 zebra	☐ ☐ —
SH Sound /sh/	 shoe	 ship	 shark	☐ ☐ —
CH Sound /ch/	 chair	 cheese	 chin	☐ ☐ —
J Sound /j/	 jump	 jar	 juice	☐ ☐ —

L Sound /l/


leg


light


lamp

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 today, and this is my cake. (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)

Language from a picture: In the kitchen

Put this picture in front of the child. Every question below is about it, and the same picture gives you the speech sample for fluency.



UNDERSTANDING - the child points or answers briefly

- Who is cooking at the stove? (points to the dad)
- Why is the girl carrying the plates? (to set the table, or to help)
- Show me the youngest person in the picture. (the baby in the high chair)

TALKING - the child produces the language

- Tell me everything the grandma is doing. (a full sentence, four or five words)
- What do you think they are going to eat? (a prediction in a sentence)
- The girl washed the dishes. Now tell me what the boy at the table did. (past tense, like "he set the table")

Following directions

Three ordinary things on the table, two of them the same kind in different sizes - a big cup and a little cup, plus a ball. Two steps with a size, color, number or order word buried in them.

- [ ] Put the little one in the big one, not the other way round. (little inside big)
- [ ] Before you give me the cup, touch the ball. (ball first, then hands over the cup)
- [ ] Give me two things from the table. (exactly two)

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)



vacuum (2)



violin (3)



dinosaur bone (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/


mother


father


brother

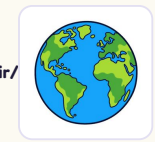
ZH Sound /zh/


measure


treasure


treasure chest

Vocalic R /er/ /ar/ /awr/ /er/ /ir/ /air/


earth


arch


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)



Clap your hands. (claps)



Stand up. (stands)

Language from a picture: In the classroom

Put this picture in front of the child. Every question below is about it, and the same picture gives you the speech sample for fluency.



UNDERSTANDING - the child points or answers briefly

- Which child is NOT sitting down? (any of the standing children - listen for whether the "not" was heard)
- Point to the child tying his shoe, and then point to the hamster. (both, in order)
- Who is sitting behind the two children reading? (the boy with his hand up)

TALKING - the child produces the language

- Tell me why the girl is pouring water into the cups. (listen for "because")
- Tell me everything that is happening at the round table. (more than one clause)
- What do you think the teacher just said? (an inference, said in a sentence)

Following directions

Three ordinary things on the table in two sizes. Three steps now, and read them once - do not repeat straight away, because the pause is often all a child needs.

- [ ] Pick up the ball, put it in the cup, and give me the cup. (all three in order)
- [ ] After you touch the chair, give me the ball. (chair first, then the ball)
- [ ] Put the biggest one on the floor and the smallest one in your lap. (both, sorted by size)

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.



earth (er - th)



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.

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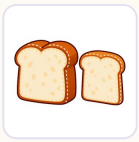
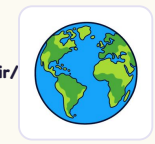
6 years

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	 thin	 thick	☐ ☐ —
R Sound /r/	 red	 run	 rain	☐ ☐ —
Vocalic R /er/ /ar/ /awr/ /er/ /ir/ /air/	 earth	 arch	 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 the ball? (a place)



When is your birthday? (a time)

Language from a picture: On the farm

Put this picture in front of the child. Every question below is about it, and the same picture gives you the speech sample for fluency.



UNDERSTANDING - the child points or answers briefly

- How do you know it is not winter in this picture? (the apples, the sunflowers, the green leaves - any one clue is enough)
- Point to an animal that is being fed, and then one that is feeding itself. (the chickens, then the cow eating hay)
- Which animals here would you find in the water? (the duck and the frog)

TALKING - the child produces the language

- What will the farmer do after he finishes feeding the chickens? (a prediction in a full sentence)
- How is the lamb different from the cow? (a comparison, not just two descriptions)
- Tell me the story of this picture, from the beginning. (a narrative with a sequence)

Following directions

Three or four ordinary things on the table. Three steps with two concepts in them, read once.

- [ ] Before you put the ball in the cup, turn the cup upside down. (order reversed correctly)
- [ ] Give me everything on the table except the cup. (everything but the cup)
- [ ] Put the ball behind you, clap twice, then tell me what you did. (all three, and can report back)

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)



row (r - oh)



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.

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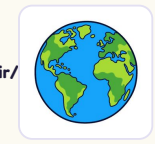
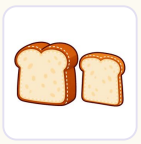
7 years and older

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/ /er/ /ir/ /air/	 earth	 arch	 arm	☐ ☐ —
Voiceless TH Sound /th/	 thumb	 thin	 thick	☐ ☐ —
Voiced TH Sound /th/	 mother	 father	 brother	☐ ☐ —

Language 9 ITEMS

Making Nouns from Other Words



Someone who teaches is a ____. (teacher)



Someone who paints is a ____. (painter)



Someone who bakes is a ____. (baker)

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)



Clap your hands. (claps)



Stand up. (stands)

Language from a picture: At the supermarket

Put this picture in front of the child. Every question below is about it, and the same picture gives you the speech sample for fluency.



UNDERSTANDING - the child points or answers briefly

- Who has nearly finished shopping, and how can you tell? (the mom with the baby - she is at the register, paying)
- Point to the person buying the most, then the person buying the least. (a comparison across the picture)
- Why is the man putting his bag on the scale? (to weigh it, to find out the price)

TALKING - the child produces the language

- Tell me what will happen when the boy with the cart gets to the register. (a sequence, in complex sentences)
- If you had to buy dinner from this store, what would you choose, and why? (a choice with a reason)

- Explain how you get from picking up food to taking it home. (a procedure, in order)

Following directions

Four ordinary things on the table. Directions with a clause buried inside them, read once, with no repetition.

- [ ] Put the ball in the cup, but only after you have moved the cup to the floor. (cup moved first)
- [ ] Give me the thing that is not the cup and not the ball. (the third object)
- [ ] Listen to all three, then do them: touch your head, turn around, sit down. (all three, in order, after the whole list)

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.



earth (er - th)



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