

# Understanding Language



We use language to make sense of everything we encounter. When something new occurs we use our existing language to categorize it and give it meaning. The more words kids know, the more they benefit from new situations. Since reading and writing are based on oral language (speaking and listening), the richer children's oral language experiences are, the better they perform in school and beyond.

The way children acquire language is through interactions with others. The most helpful interactions are those with the adults in their environment. Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Lives of Children, is an important research article written by Risley and Hart that shows the very significant advantage children have when their home is rich in oral language. Just being exposed to lots of talking, and lots of verbal interaction gives children a distinct advantage when they begin school.

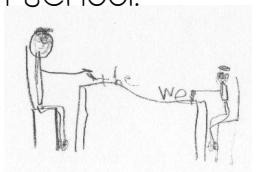
There are 2 parts to language:

Receptive – what we understand

Expressive – the language we use

As you probably noticed in your own child's development, receptive language often comes before expressive. Often babies understand what you say before they are able to express their thoughts. This is also often true when learning a foreign language – it seems easier to understand what is being said than to speak the language.

There are 4 areas of language that children need to learn how to use in order to communicate effectively. When a child has a problem in any of these areas, communication is likely to break down.



## Area of language

## Receptive

## Expressive

### Phonology

Words are made up of sounds

Children must understand and respond appropriately to words

Use the sounds of language to form words and sentences

### Syntax

Rules that organize our language

Children must understand the structures in oral language

Use these structures in their own speech

### Semantics

Words carry meaning

Children must understand the meaning of spoken words

Use words with intended meaning to communicate

### Pragmatics

Oral language is embedded with meanings for social interactions.

Children must understand how different social situations call for different language interactions.

Use language appropriate for these social situations

