

TIP SHEET 3



The advice given on this tip sheet is by Lucia Smith, Speech Pathologist.

It is based on experience from her clinical work along with her work consulting with teachers and parents.

It is difficult to address all children's communication styles in a single tip sheet.

If you are concerned about your child's speech or language development, please see a speech pathologist.



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PREPARING MY PRESCHOOLER FOR READING AND WRITING

Research shows us that there are several skills that children should develop before learning to read and write. Children who are strong in these areas usually have success in literacy learning in the school years.

The skills are:

- 1. ORAL NARRATIVE SKILLS** – the ability to tell a story in a sequence. It should have a start, a middle and an end and it should include who was in the story, what happened and when it happened.
- 2. VOCABULARY SKILLS** – this involves the number of words that a child understands (receptive vocabulary) and the number of words a child uses (expressive vocabulary).
- 3. PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS** – this involves the awareness that speech is made up of words and these are made up of sounds. It is the awareness that some words sound similar and some sound different. It is the ability to “play around” with the sound of words.
- 4. LETTER KNOWLEDGE** - this is the ability to recognise and name letters. Later, it is the ability to quickly write letters.
- 5. LETTER – SOUND LINKING SKILLS** – this is the understanding that letters are different to sounds. It is an understanding that sounds can be represented by letters.

BUT FIRST!...if you have any concerns about your child's vision or hearing, please take these seriously. Sometimes, I meet children in schools who are struggling with literacy, only to find they need glasses.

1. PROMOTING ORAL NARRATIVE SKILLS:

- Read stories to your child. Choose books that they love. Talk about the story, guess what might happen next, at the end of the story think and talk about WHO was in the story, WHERE did the story happen, WHEN did it happen. Relate the story to your child's life.
- Make up stories as you play. Get some "characters" together (dolls, teddies) and some props (boxes for houses, some objects) and make up a story together. Use "story type" words such as "one day" and "then all of a sudden" and "in the end..." You can stop and discuss what might happen next in your story. This can be done anywhere – in the bath, in a waiting room...
- Take a series of photos during an event and make a story book. Think about a photo that would suit the start and end. Write the story together after the event has finished. This is particularly easy with digital cameras. If you know how to, you could even make a PowerPoint slideshow with the words recorded over. Eg. Once upon a time Mum, Danni and I went to the zoo. We packed our bags and walked to the train station... and so on. Get your child to show and tell the story to someone else.
- Tell Teddy. This is an activity where you tell a short story to your child as you look at a book or sequence pictures. Then you get out a favourite teddy (or doll) and get your child to re-tell the story to the teddy. Some children love doing this and will more readily do this than telling you the story back. Getting your child to tell a story to a younger sibling is also another option.
- "Sequence pictures" are great for developing oral narrative skills. First the pictures are put in order and then the child "tells the story". If your child is resistant, you could start off, then they could continue... or you could tell the whole story then your child could tell the story back to you.

Pelican Talk's "Fun with Sequences" contains many sequence pictures and activity ideas to promote oral narrative skills. See www.pelicantalk.com



From FUN WITH SEQUENCES ©

2. PROMOTING VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT When your child starts to read, a good vocabulary puts them at a great advantage. Word knowledge will help them anticipate what word might come next in a sentence. For example, a child might read “He put the flowers in the _____” and then get stuck on the next word that starts with “v”. Even if a child does not know how to read the word, they may be able to guess just from the first letter that the word must be “vase”. If their vocabulary does not include the word “vase”, they will get stuck at this point. Writing also requires an adequate vocabulary. Early writers need to be using a whole lot of skills at once; thinking of how their story will go, thinking of the sounds in each word, thinking of the letters that go with those sounds and figuring out how to write the letters. If the child has a vocabulary that is limited or if they are slow to think of the words they want to use, their writing will suffer. A child needs to be able to think of and use words fluently in their speech, if they are to write with success.

There are many ways to promote vocabulary growth. These ideas are available on **Pelican Talk’s Tip Sheet 7: “Ten Tips for Increasing a Child’s Vocabulary”**.

3. PROMOTING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

The earliest phonological awareness skill is understanding that speech is made up of words. Very young children do not know this – they just talk and don’t think about what their talking is made of! In order to put speech into writing and vice versa, a child needs an awareness that speech is made up of parts that can be pulled apart and joined together. They also need to develop an awareness that there are patterns in and between words. This is phonological awareness. By the time a child starts school, they should have developed word awareness and some syllable and rhyme awareness. Phonemic awareness such as first sound identification should also be developing.

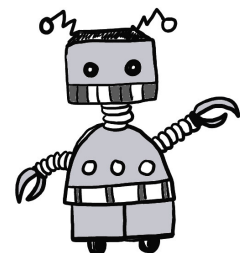
Word awareness activities:

- Set up a game where you put a treasure box at a distance. For every word you say, you can take a step towards the treasure. Say a sentence and show the child how this can be done. You might say “I like gold” and take three steps coinciding with each word. You might need to make up the sentence for your child... “I like diamonds and treasure.” You might comment “I think that one has more words – see how many steps you get.” The first one to the treasure wins. (Your child might start thinking of long sentences for themselves).
- Read a sentence in a book and as you say each word, touch each word. You might even get your child to guess the last word as you point to it.
- Get a puppet to talk to your child. As the puppet says each word, make its head go side to side. This reinforces each word.

Syllable awareness activities:

Syllables are simply the beats in a word. Eg. The word camel has two syllables and magazine has three.

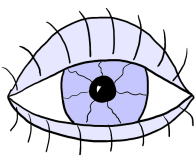
- Make a robot out of a box. Pretend to be the robot talking by speaking in a disjointed syllabic manner. Request things from around the room and get your child to guess what you are saying. Eg. pa – per. Try two syllable and then three syllable words. If this is easy, try leaving a longer pause between each syllable that you say.



- Get together a whole pile of objects or a stack of picture cards. Get three boxes and write 1, 2 and 3 on each. Tell your child you want to listen for how many claps are in each word. Pick up the first object/card and say the word. Say the word again and clap as you say each syllable. Put the object/card into the corresponding box.
- **NOTE:** Some young children will shorten long words even in their speech. For example, they might say “ephant” for “elephant”, or “tephone” for “telephone”. This is normal in young speakers, but clapping out syllables can really help in making them aware of small quick syllables.

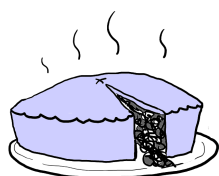
(50% of children can clap out syllables in a word by 4 years of age, 90% can do this by 5 years of age)

Awareness of rhyme: Rhyme is important for children to be able to notice patterns in similar words. For example, later in reading and writing, if a child can spell “hat”, rhyme awareness should help them spell “mat” “pat” and “flat”.



- Read books that contain rhyme. Dr. Seuss books are great for this. Read the text and then repeat to your child the words that rhyme; Eg. From *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss; “*He was shortish. And oldish. And brownish. And mossy. And spoke in a voice that was sharpish and bossy.*”

You could then follow this by saying “Hey listen... *mossy ... bossy...* they sound a bit the same... they rhyme.”



- Make up some picture cards using pictures from magazines. Sort the ones which rhyme. Tell your child to listen as you say two words. Then ask “Do they rhyme?” Some easy pictures to find are: Hair, chair, man, can, car, jar, mat, hat, dog, log, one, sun, plate, gate, boy, toy, grass, glass,
- Play around with names and rhyme. Things don’t have to make sense. For example, “Here comes Sarah Fairer and Reuben Doobin.” Put yourself in a child’s mind. Silly is good!

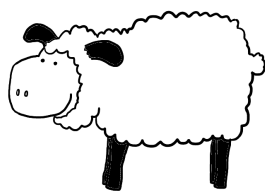
(Children can usually pick out which words rhyme by the age of 6 years, but they need lots of practise hearing and reciting rhymes to get to this point).

Sound awareness activities (phonemic awareness) :

Phonemic awareness is one of the strongest predictors of literacy success. It involves “the awareness that words are made up of individual speech sounds”.

Pelican Talk Tip Sheet 6 lists ten tips to encourage phonemic awareness. See www.pelicantalk.com

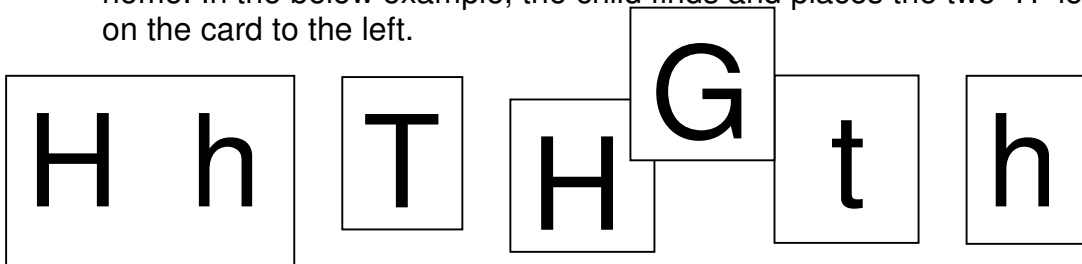
- The Speech Sound Set © from Pelican Talk also promotes phonemic awareness. It exposes children to consonant sounds through a set of fun characters. For example, children learn that the “ssss” sound is the sound that Sammy Snake makes and the “shhh” sound is the sound that “Sharna Shoosh” makes. Lovely Lara makes the “l” sound. Children learn to think about the mouthshapes that make all the sounds and later, they learn about the letters that go with them. **(By the age of 6 years most children can match two words that start with the same sound).**



4. PROMOTING LETTER KNOWLEDGE Many parents have said to me proudly that their child knew their alphabet before starting school. This is wonderful, but doesn't necessarily mean the child will be strong at letter knowledge. Learning to recite the alphabet can be no more than learning to recite a rhyme or a ditty with little or no meaning attached. Letter knowledge is more than this. It involves the ability to distinguish a letter from numbers and other shapes. It is the understanding that writing is made up of letters. Later, it is the ability to name some letters and to write a few also. By the start of school, it puts your child at a great advantage if they can name and write a few letters. A huge study of children's letter naming ability in first year of schooling in USA (DIBELS) reports that children are "at risk" of literacy difficulties if they cannot name more than 2 letters quickly. (The test involves capital and lowercase letters being presented in a scrambled order. Children are given a minute to name as many as they can). Children naming only 2-8 letters are seen as having "some risk".

So from an early age:

- Expose children to puzzles or wall friezes that contain alphabet. Tell your child the letter names, but not necessarily in order. Relate the letter to a familiar word or name. Eg. "That's an S... We write that at the start of your name."
- If your child is only learning, they might resist being tested, so avoid asking too many questions. Instead ask a question and answer it yourself... "What's this letter name? It's a T". Your child will join in when they know the answer.
- Some letters are easy to learn because they have very distinctive shapes. An S and an O are two examples. Talk about the shape of each letter. Remember that some letters (like an M and W) can be very confusing as one is the same as the upside-down version of the other. Talk about this with your child. Try and explain the shape of the letters. Eg. The letter M looks like two mountains. As in this example, it's particularly good if you can relate the shape of the letter to a word starting with that letter.
- Play a game where you have to spot a certain letter on street or shop signs. See how many you can find together.
- Don't forget there are capitals and lower-case letters to learn. I have heard some parents, incorrectly, explain that the capitals say the letter name and the lower-case say the sound. This is not so and will only lead to confusion later at school.
- Children can play a letter matching game. This can be made simply at home. In the below example, the child finds and places the two "H" letters on the card to the left.



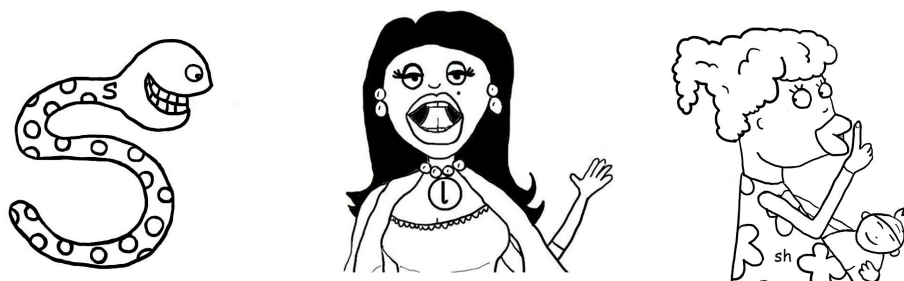
(Don't set about learning too many letters at once!)

- Practise writing some letters together. You might get your child to trace over a letter that you have first written. As you write a letter, say what you are doing. Eg. "Okay, let's write this letter "T"... Down and across..."
- When helping a child write their name, I encourage starting with a capital and writing the rest in lower-case. This sets up good habits for later on.

5. LETTER – SOUND LINKING SKILLS

At a preschool age, helping your child understand the difference between a letter and a (speech) sound will help them when they come to tackle more formal literacy learning at school.

- Do this by being clear about the concept yourself. I explain to children that a letter is something that we write or something that is written in a book. A sound is something that we can hear and something that comes out of our mouths.
- When looking at a letter, you can say “That letter’s name is _____ and that letter makes the sound _____”.
- For children who are really having trouble with the concept, I show them a picture of a dog and say “This animal’s name is DOG. The sound that it makes is WOOF. Then I show a letter. “This letter’s name is _____ and the sound it makes is _____”
- The Speech Sound Set © pictures encourage children to learn and think about sounds. When they have explored the sound that a character makes, they are encouraged to look for the letter on the picture. The letter is then named. For example, “Here’s Sammy Snake. The sound that comes out of his mouth is ssssssssss. (*Point to his mouth*). Can you make that sound? He has a letter on his body. It’s a letter S (ess). (*Point to the letter*). The letter S makes the sound... ssssssssss.” Children can spend time making the sounds of each character as they colour them or the colour flashcards can be printed and included in play. They can also “find the letter” on each character and with the help of an adult, learn to name the letter. By doing this, the distinction between sounds and letters becomes clearer.

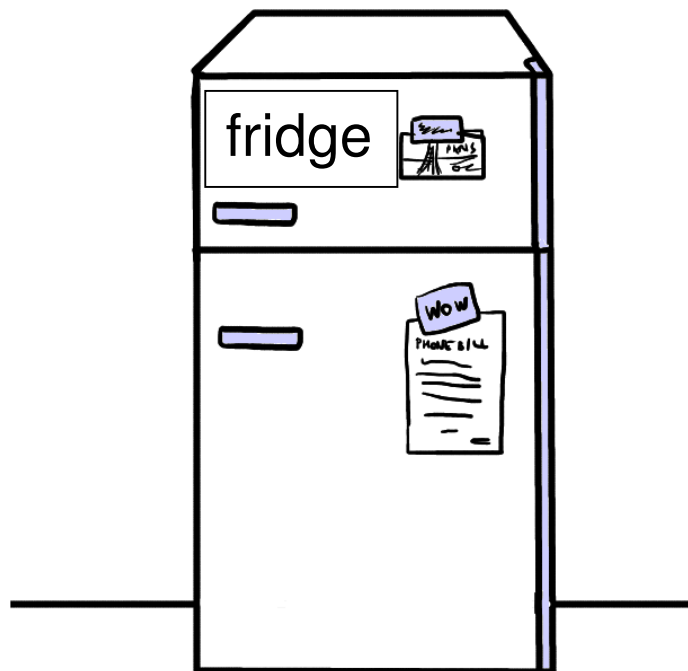


Three characters from The Speech Sound Set ©

- In reading, occasionally make a comment like - “There’s an S... this word starts with the sound ssssssss,” then go on to say the word. Of course there are many irregularities in spelling, so stick to regular words when giving examples to young children.
- If you have a bright child called Sean or a clever daughter called Cecilia, you are bound to get comments like “You said that the letter S said ssssssssssssss, but my name starts with S and it doesn’t start with sssss” or “My name starts with the letter C but it doesn’t start with the Catie Kookaburra sound.” These are signs of good phonemic awareness. You are better to back yourself by saying things like “The letter S *usually* says the ssssss sound”.

AND A FEW FINAL HINTS...

- Above all, show your child the joy of reading and writing.
- Always have plenty of books around and try to share at least one book with your child each day.
- If you have special books that you are worried your child might rip or ruin, go to an Op Shop and buy a bag of second-hand books.
- Have paper and pencils available at all times and encourage your child to “write” letters, lists or stories. Go to local businesses and ask if they have any scrap paper that they can give you.
- When your child draws a picture, get them to tell you a sentence to go with it and write the words for them.
- Some families like to write the words for objects and rooms on cards and stick them around the house (eg. bathroom, chair, door, fridge and so on). This can help children to learn a whole bank of sight words.
- Reading or writing should never be something that a child is pressured into doing. If you are concerned that your child is not developing the above-mentioned pre-literacy skills, you may consider contacting a speech pathologist for further assessment and advice.



If you have any questions or feedback regarding the tips given above,
please email me at lucia@pelicantalk.com