


HELPING YOUR CHILD GROW: WHY ORAL LANGUAGE AND GRAMMAR MATTERS

 Oral language — a child's ability to understand and express thoughts using spoken words — is one of the strongest foundations for reading success in elementary school.

Oral Language Includes:

- Vocabulary (knowing and using words)
- Grammar (putting words together correctly)
- Sentence structure (understanding and producing sentences)
- Storytelling and explanation (organizing ideas logically)
- Listening comprehension (understanding what others say)



Oral Language is the Foundation of Reading

Before a child can read or write well, they need strong oral language skills. Grammar is a core part of this.

- Children use grammar to understand sentences when listening — this skill transfers directly to reading comprehension.
- If a child struggles to understand a sentence like “The dog was chased by the cat,” they’ll also have difficulty understanding it while reading.

Grammar Helps with Sentence Meaning

Grammar tells us who did what to whom, and when. For example: “He is jumping” vs. “He jumped”. Understanding verb tense helps children figure out when something happened.

Grammar Helps with Writing Too

Reading and writing are closely connected. Children who speak clearly and use correct grammar are more likely to:

- Write complete sentences
- Use a variety of sentence types
- Express their ideas more clearly in writing assignments

KINDERGARTEN GRAMMAR SKILLS

By the end of Kindergarten, many children begin to develop the building blocks of grammar that help them speak and eventually write in clear, complete sentences. Every child develops at their own pace, but here are some common early grammar skills to look for:

What Your Child May Be Able to Do in Kindergarten:

✚ Use Complete Sentences (4–6 words or more)

- Instead of: "Want cookie."
- You might hear: "I want a cookie, please."

💬 Use Pronouns Correctly

- Uses words like I, me, he, she, we, they to talk about themselves and others.
- Example: "She is my friend." or "We are going outside."

📍 Use Prepositions (Location Words)

- Understands and uses words like in, on, under, over, next to.
- Example: "The toy is under the bed."

? Use question words

- Uses Who, What, Where questions regularly
- Uses When questions (emerges later in Kindergarten).
- Why questions (emerges later and continues into Grade 1).
- How questions (early forms may appear, but more complex usage comes later).

ab cd Use Regular Plural Words

- Adds -s or -es to make words plural.
- Example: "I see cats." / "There are three buses."

🕒 Begin to Use Simple Past Tense Verbs

- Adds -ed to regular action words.
- Example: "I played with my friend."
- (May still make errors with tricky words: "goed" instead of "went" — that's okay for now!)

🖋️ Use Describing Words (Adjectives)

- Begins adding simple details to sentences.
- Example: "It's a big truck!" or "That's a blue ball."

🧠 Keep Words in the Right Order

- Sentences start to sound like adult speech with correct grammar.
- Example: "I'm going to the park." (instead of "Going I to park.").



Why grammar matters at this age:

Good grammar helps children express their thoughts clearly. It supports reading, writing, and classroom learning. Strong early grammar skills are linked to later academic success — especially in writing and comprehension.

Ask for support if your child:

- Uses mostly 1-2 word phrases by the end of Kindergarten
- Is very hard to understand, even for close family
- Struggles to form sentences or leaves out key words
- Seems frustrated trying to talk

GRADE 1 GRAMMAR SKILLS

In Grade 1, children are developing important grammar skills that help them express themselves clearly in speaking and writing. These skills also support their reading and learning across subjects

What Your Child May Be Able to Do in Grade 1:

Use Complete Sentences

- Speak and write sentences with a subject and verb.
- Example: "The dog runs fast." or "I like apples."

Use Pronouns Correctly

- Uses words like I, me, he, she, we, they to talk about themselves and others.
- Example: "She is my friend." or "We are going outside."

Use Prepositions (Location Words)

- Understands and uses words like in, on, under, over, next to, behind, in front of, between, above, below
- Is beginning awareness of prepositions for time and movement. E.g., before, after, to, from.

Asking and Answering Simple Questions

- Uses Who, What, Where, When, Why, How questions
- Children may use simpler question words like who, what, and where more frequently at first.

Use Regular Plural Words

- Adds -s or -es to make words plural.
- Example: "I see cats." / "There are three boxes."

Begin to Use Simple Past Tense Verbs

- Use present tense correctly.
- Begin to use simple past tense verbs, especially regular forms ending in -ed.
- Example: "I walk to school." / "Yesterday, I walked home."

Use Describing Words (Adjectives)

- Begins using a variety of adjectives
- Example: "The blanket is soft" or "He is a nice dog"

Subject-Verb Agreement

- Match singular and plural subjects with the correct verb form.
- Example: "He runs." / "They run."



Why grammar matters at this age:

Children are not just learning to talk – they are learning to read, write, and think clearly. Grammar helps:

- Support clear communication
- build reading comprehension
- Improve writing skills

Ask for support if your child:

- Has trouble with verb tenses
- Limited vocabulary or word finding difficulties
- Difficulty understanding or using question words
- Problems organizing thoughts or telling stories

GRADE 2 GRAMMAR SKILLS

By Grade 2, children's grammar skills become more advanced, supporting their growing reading, writing, and speaking abilities. Children need to speak in full, grammatically correct sentences so that others understand what they're saying.

What Your Child May Be Able to Do in Grade 2:

Use Complete and Complex Sentences

- Speak and write complete sentences with clear subjects and verbs.
- Begin to use compound sentences joined by conjunctions like *and*, *but*, or *or*.
- Example: "I went to the park, and I played with my friend."

Use Pronouns Correctly

- Use subject, object, and possessive pronouns appropriately.
- Example: "He gave me his pencil."

Use Prepositions (Location Words)

- Use a variety of prepositions to describe location, time, and direction.
- Example: "The cat is under the table." / "We will leave after lunch."

Asking and Answering Questions

- Understand how to answer a wide range of questions
- Use follow-up questions to seek more detail
- Ask questions to solve problems or satisfy curiosity in class (e.g., social science)

Use Plurals and Possessives

- Form plurals with *-s* and *-es*. Begin to use possessive *'s* correctly.
- Example: "The dogs are barking." / "That is Sarah's book."

Correct Verb Tense Use

- Use past, present, and future tenses correctly.
- Use regular and many irregular past tense forms correctly.
- Example: "Yesterday, I ran to school." / "Tomorrow, I will go swimming."

Use Adjectives and Adverbs

- Use adjectives and adverbs to describe verbs (often ending in *-ly*).
- Example: "The tall tree." / "She runs quickly."

Consistent Subject-Verb Agreement

- Match singular and plural subjects with correct verbs consistently.
- Example: "She runs fast." / "They run fast."



Why grammar matters at this age:

At this stage, students are expected to use language not just to talk about the "here and now," but to explain ideas, tell stories, and succeed in academic tasks across subjects.

Ask for support if your child:

- Frequently speaks in ungrammatical sentences
- Has trouble using past tense (e.g., says "runned" instead of "ran")
- Has difficulty forming longer sentences with words like *because*, *but*, or *after*
- Difficulty answer *who*, *when*, *why*, or *how* questions

GRADE 3 GRAMMAR SKILLS

By Grade 3, children are expected to use more advanced grammar as they speak, write, and explain their thinking in school. Strong grammar skills help kids read more complex texts, write clear sentences, and communicate their ideas effectively.

What Your Child May Be Able to Do in Grade 3:

Speak and Write in Complete Sentences

- Speak and write complete sentences with clear subjects and verbs.
- Uses simple, compound, and beginning complex sentences
- Uses conjunctions like and, but, because, when, so, if
- Example: "I wanted to go outside, but it was raining."

Use Pronouns Correctly

- Use subject, object, and possessive pronouns appropriately.
- Example: "He gave me his pencil."

Use Prepositions (Location Words)

- Words like in, on, under, after, before, between, during, through, around
- Example: "We had lunch after recess." / "The ball went under the couch."

Asking and Answering Questions

- At this stage, they not only ask questions to gather information but also to clarify, explain, and build deeper understanding

Use Plurals and Possessives

- Form plurals with -s and -es. Begin to use possessive 's correctly.
- Example: "The dogs are barking." / "That is Sarah's book."

Correct Verb Tense Use

- Uses past, present, and future tenses correctly
- Uses both regular (e.g., walked) and many irregular verbs (e.g., ate, ran, gave)
- Example: "Yesterday, we went to the zoo."

Use Adjectives and Adverbs

- Describes nouns and verbs with more specific words
- Example: "The tall boy ran quickly across the field."

Consistent Subject-Verb Agreement

- Match singular and plural subjects with correct verbs consistently.
- Example: "She runs fast." / "They run fast."



Why grammar matters at this age:

By Grade 3, children are expected to use more sophisticated grammar skills as they transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." They need language that is clear, organized, and appropriate for explaining, writing, and problem-solving.

Ask for support if your child:

- If a child is struggling significantly with grammar, it could be a sign of an underlying language disorder, such as Developmental Language Disorder (DLD).

DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a condition where a child has ongoing difficulties with understanding and/or using spoken language. These difficulties are not explained by hearing loss, intellectual disability, or another medical condition.

DLD is common—it affects about 1 in 14 children—and often goes unrecognized because the signs can be subtle or mistaken for other challenges.

Expressive Language (Talking)

Speaking in short or incomplete sentences

- “Him want truck” instead of “He wants the truck.”

Struggling to find the right words

- “I need the... the... that thing... for cutting.”

Leaving out small grammar words

- “Dog chase cat” instead of “The dog is chasing the cat.”

Using the wrong verb tenses or word forms

- “We goed to the park” instead of “We went to the park.”

Other signs of DLD might be:

Difficulty telling stories in order

- Important parts may be missing, mixed up, or hard to follow.

Trouble learning new vocabulary

- Especially academic words or words that aren’t used in everyday conversation.

Avoiding speaking, being very quiet, or giving short/simple responses

- This can be mistaken for shyness or a behavior issue.

Receptive Language (Understanding)

Having trouble following multi-step directions

- “Put your folder on the table and grab a pencil” may only result in one part being done.

Difficulty understanding questions or stories

- “Why did the boy run away?” may get a blank stare or unrelated answer.

Getting confused by longer sentences

- Especially in the classroom, where instructions and learning often happen through language.



If You Suspect DLD

Talk to your school’s speech-language pathologist, classroom teacher, or family doctor. Early support helps children with DLD thrive in school and life.

DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)

Many children in school are learning English as an additional language (ELL). Some of these children may also have a language disorder, such as Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). Knowing the difference between a language delay due to learning a new language and a true language disorder is important.

What's the Difference Between DLD and Learning English?

ELL (Typically Developing)	ELL with DLD (Language Disorder)
Language errors are normal at first and improve with exposure to English	Language errors are persistent and occur in both English and the home language
Child learns new vocabulary steadily. Child improves over time with immersion.	Child struggles to learn and remember new words. Child shows ongoing difficulty despite support
Sentence structure becomes more accurate with time	Grammar errors persist and may sound immature or disorganized
Understands classroom routines and basic concepts after exposure	Continues to misunderstand instructions or questions, even with repetition and after adequate exposure

If an ELL student has DLD it may look like:

- They may speak in very short sentences or leave out grammar words in both languages
 - "Me go store" instead of "I went to the store."
- Struggle to tell stories clearly or in the right order
- Have difficulty following instructions in any language
- Use the wrong verb tense or mix up word forms
 - "He eated the apple" / "She go yesterday"
- Have a smaller vocabulary than peers in both languages

How Is DLD Identified in ELL Students?

Speech-language pathologists use multiple tools to make sure we don't mistake normal second language learning for a disorder.

If You Suspect DLD

Talk to your school's speech-language pathologist, classroom teacher, or family doctor. Early support helps children with DLD thrive in school and life.