

# THE CENTER FOR SPEECH EXCELLENCE

## Language and Reading Disorders

Language skills are involved in speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

**Spoken language** is the oral presentation of words which represent specific ideas. Words have been arbitrarily assigned to represent a concept. For example, a cat is a cat because that is the name all English speaking people assign to the animal.

**Listening** involves attending to the speech of another and comprehending the words. This skill may be called auditory processing. Speaking and listening are opposite ends of the same system.

**Written Language** refers to symbols which are based upon spoken language codes. Standard written English gives us all a recorded vocabulary of over 1 1/2 million words, regardless of the dialect or regional meaning imparted in our spoken language.

**Reading** refers to the decoding and comprehension of written language. Reading and writing are opposite ends of the same system. **Reading :1. Enlarges our pool of language**-new concepts learned in reading are then used in oral language. **2. Restructures thoughts**- wunsapawnatime may emerge as "once upon a time" only after the child is able to read . **3. Provides facts** and **4. Helps us solve problems** using "inner speech".

When decoding, the reader scans the print looking for graphic clues to compare with prior knowledge of word spellings and meanings. Decoding involves a knowledge of sound symbol associations, an ability to discriminate between sounds, sequence sounds, and blend them into words. As one reads, the eye vibrates so the image will appear on more than one point of the retina. As a result, each word has been in fixation three or four times, and its visual relationship with the preceding and following three or four words has been examined. People can read or listen to around 200 words per minute. Reading *can* go much faster, but at increased speeds, we remember only meanings, not exact wording. Meaning (comprehension) is the most important part. We can give an exact repetition of only a 7-8 word sentence, while we can repeat the meaning of a much longer passage.

People who have language disorders have difficulty with speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Since written language is based on oral language, impaired oral language will translate into impaired reading and written language. Comprehension of a passage involves at least three kinds of information: 1. **Sentence structure** (The boy was chased by the girl, or the girl chased the boy.) 2. **Context**: some meaning can be derived from information already presented. 3.

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**Reader's world knowledge:** the reader must have prior knowledge of word meanings, relationships, and events **or** be able to find that information in order to comprehend. The same

types of information go into creating (writing) a passage.

**Memory** deficits cause problems recalling meanings of words or sound-symbol associations. If words are not comprehended or are difficult to decode, the reading process is slowed down. At that point, the gist of the passage may be forgotten while resources are turned toward these other challenges.

A person who has a language disorder **may exhibit** the following reading characteristics:

- Difficulty discriminating between sounds when decoding words (example: reads hat for bat).
- Rearranges the sound sequence (example: aminal for animal).
- Struggles decoding a word, figures it out or is told what the word is, then cannot decode it the next time it occurs in the passage.
- Trouble remembering the meanings of words, but reads on anyway, resulting in poor comprehension of the passage.
- Cannot remember events that occurred earlier in the story, or remembers them out of sequence.
- Difficulty determining the main idea and summarizing the story.
- Difficulty inferring meaning which is not explicit.
- Difficulty attending to a task, especially when careful listening or reading is required.

**Assistance:**

We can offer the following assistance:

- Language evaluation including assessment of vocabulary, syntax, sound discrimination, and memory as they relate to reading, writing, and verbal communication.
- Written report of scores, judgment of age-appropriateness, and recommendations.
- Consult with physician, family, teachers, after-school programs, or others.
- Therapy to improve skills with suggestions for home practice and management.

*Adapted from Language Disorders And Learning Disabilities, Ed. by Katharine G. Butler and Geraldine P. Wallach, and from "Language and Reading: An Integrated Approach for Language-Learning Disabled School-Age Children," unpublished Master of Science paper by Susan E. Hance.*

*-Compiled by Susan E. Hance, M.S., CCC-SLP © 1994*

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