

Reception Vocabulary Progression

Vocabulary Intent

In Reception, vocabulary development is at the heart of our Communication and Language curriculum. Children are immersed in rich, purposeful language through high-quality stories, poems, rhymes, Drawing Club, Monster Phonics, continuous provision, play and adult interactions.

We explicitly teach and model new vocabulary, revisit previously taught words and provide children with repeated opportunities to hear, understand and use words in context. Vocabulary is selected carefully from stories, topics and children's experiences, with a particular focus on developing **Tier 2 vocabulary** alongside essential subject-specific **Tier 3 vocabulary**.

Children are encouraged to:

- listen carefully to and understand new words;
- develop an increasingly wide vocabulary;
- use new vocabulary in conversation and play;
- explain and describe using increasingly precise language;
- make links between words and concepts;
- use vocabulary from stories in their own talk, play and Drawing Club work;
- develop confidence in speaking in full sentences;
- revisit and retain vocabulary over time.

Vocabulary Progression Across Reception

Area	Autumn Term	Spring Term	Summer Term
People & relationships	family, friend, adult, child, baby, boy, girl, teacher, helper	neighbour, visitor, partner, team, community, group	character, hero, villain, leader, explorer, stranger
Feelings & emotions	happy, sad, cross, worried, scared, excited, tired	nervous, frustrated, surprised, proud, disappointed, confused, calm	curious, determined, relieved, embarrassed, lonely, hopeful, confident
Describing	big, small, tall, short, hot, cold, wet, dry, soft, hard	enormous, tiny, enormous, smooth, rough, heavy, light, bright, dark, noisy, quiet	enormous, miniature, delicate, powerful, mysterious, ancient, unusual, magnificent
Position & movement	in, on, under, next to, behind, in front, up, down, over, through	between, beside, around, across, towards, away, inside, outside	beneath, beyond, underneath, above, below, opposite, direction, journey
Time & sequence	now, then, today, tomorrow, yesterday, morning, afternoon, night	first, next, after, before, later, soon, finally	meanwhile, eventually, suddenly, immediately, previously, afterwards
Actions	go, stop, walk, run, jump, sit, stand, look, see, hear	investigate, explore, discover, collect, create, build, carry, travel	observe, examine, search, rescue, escape, journey, investigate, construct
Thinking & learning	know, think, remember, forget, choose, find, learn	wonder, predict, notice, explain, compare, decide, question	suggest, reason, solve, imagine, describe, justify, investigate
Speaking & communication	say, tell, ask, answer, talk, listen, speak	explain, describe, discuss, agree, disagree, share, respond	persuade, retell, question, clarify, perform, present
Size & quantity	one, two, more, less, many, few, big, small, full, empty	most, least, equal, pair, half, whole, enough, fewer, greater	several, plenty, fewer, greater, equal, nearly, approximately
Nature & environment	tree, leaf, flower, grass, sun, rain, wind, cloud	plant, seed, root, stem, petal, soil, habitat, weather	environment, season, growth, life cycle, shelter, natural, protect
Animals	animal, pet, dog, cat, bird, insect, farm, wild	mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, insect, habitat, nest, burrow	predator, prey, camouflage, nocturnal, endangered, offspring
Materials	wood, plastic, paper, metal, glass, fabric, water	smooth, rough, bendy, stiff, stretchy, waterproof, transparent	absorbent, flexible, rigid, strong, weak, waterproof, fragile

Story language	story, book, character, beginning, middle, end	setting, problem, solution, adventure, journey, event	author, illustrator, character, plot, narrator, scene, ending
Storytelling	once, one day, suddenly, then, next	meanwhile, after, before, finally	eventually, suddenly, immediately, fortunately, unfortunately
Pattern & description	same, different, colour, shape, pattern	repeat, sequence, match, compare	symmetrical, similar, different, pattern, sequence
Position & shape	circle, square, triangle, rectangle, side, corner	cube, cuboid, sphere, cone, cylinder, face, edge	2D shape, 3D shape, curved, straight, flat, round
Construction & making	build, make, join, cut, stick, fix	design, plan, create, construct, attach, balance	design, structure, strengthen, improve, construct, evaluate
Community & world	home, school, street, shop, doctor, police, firefighter	village, town, city, country, map, journey, transport	community, culture, tradition, celebration, country, world
Celebrations & traditions	birthday, Christmas, celebration, special	Easter, festival, tradition, family, ceremony	celebration, culture, tradition, ceremony, special, remember

Core Tier 2 Vocabulary

The following words should be deliberately modelled and revisited throughout Reception. These are words that children are likely to encounter across different contexts and which support their ability to understand and express increasingly complex ideas.

Describing	Emotions	Thinking	Actions	Storytelling
- enormous - tiny - enormous - magnificent - unusual - mysterious	- worried - nervous - frustrated - surprised - disappointed - confused	- wonder - notice - remember - predict - imagine - discover	- explore - investigate - discover - observe - examine - collect	- beginning - ending - character - setting - problem - solution

• beautiful • terrible • enormous • delicate • powerful • colourful • ancient • miniature	• proud • curious • determined • relieved • lonely • hopeful • confident	• investigate • decide • choose • compare • explain • understand	• construct • create • rescue • escape • journey • search • protect • transform	• adventure • journey • suddenly • meanwhile • eventually • fortunately • unfortunately
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Vocabulary for Developing Oracy

Children should increasingly move from simple labels and phrases towards using vocabulary to express complete ideas.

Early Reception

"The dog is big."

"I am scared."

"It is raining."

Developing Reception

"The dog is enormous."

"The character is worried because she is lost."

"I think it is going to rain."

Expected by the End of Reception

"I think the character feels nervous because she doesn't know where she is."

"The enormous bear travelled through the dark forest to find his friend."

"I noticed that the plant grew taller because it had water and sunlight."

Adults should model and extend children's language rather than simply correcting it.

Child: "It's a big dog."

Adult: "Yes, it is an enormous dog. It's much bigger than the little puppy."

Vocabulary Through Stories

High-quality stories should provide a rich source of vocabulary. When introducing a new text, adults should identify a small number of **high-value words** to explicitly teach.

For each new word, children should experience:

Hear → Understand → See → Say → Use → Revisit

For example:

Word: *enormous*

Hear: Adult models the word in context.

Understand: Discuss what enormous means.

See: Find an enormous object or picture.

Say: Children repeat and use the word.

Use: "The enormous giant walked through the forest."

Revisit: Use the word later during Drawing Club, continuous provision or another story.

Vocabulary in Drawing Club

Drawing Club provides regular opportunities for children to develop and apply vocabulary through storytelling, character creation, oral rehearsal and imaginative play.

Vocabulary should include:

Character	Setting	Action	Description	Story Structure
• character • hero • villain • creature • giant • fairy • wizard • explorer • inventor • friend	• forest • castle • cave • village • mountain • river • island • garden • underground • mysterious	• travelled • explored • discovered • escaped • rescued • searched • climbed • wandered • raced • transformed	• enormous • tiny • magical • mysterious • frightening • beautiful • sparkling • gloomy • ancient • powerful	• beginning • problem • adventure • journey • solution • ending • suddenly • meanwhile • eventually • fortunately • unfortunately

Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Not Now, Bernard - gobble - chomp - destroy - ignore - astonished The Little Red Hen - baking - ingredients - rising - unhelpful - concocting Wacky Races - accelerate - steering - chuckle - demolish - braking Whats in the Witches Kitchen? - Disgusting - Cackle - Surprise	Pirate Peter - peer - voyage - ocean - directions Chicken Licken - devoured - smirking - gullible - hysterical Road Runner - speedy - zooming - patient - boulder The Hairy Toe - furry - ancient - fearful - creep Goldilocks and the three bears - demolished	A dark, dark, tale - isolated - shocked - terrified - shining The Gingerbread Man - leap - cunning - soggy - disappointed Pink Panther - splodge - comical - active - furios - stamp Je mhabille et... je te croque! - Greedy - Vicious - Sneak - sly The Three Little Pigs	Room on the Broom - Whoosh - Splat - Horrible - Fiery Hansel and Gretel - confectionary - wicked - scary - cauldron Batfink - sidekick - spark - rapid - napping - hurdle Penguin - adore - silent - embrace - swallow The White Hen and the fox	Were Going on a Bear Hunt - wandering - obstacle - courageous - panic - flee - hide The Three Billy Goats Gruff - creaky - gruesome - determined - bamboozle Willo the Wisp - peaceful - fearless - teeny weeny - transform - dawdle Would You Rather - freezing - boiling	The Giant Jam Sandwich - boiling - escape - ginormous - expand - hovering The Ugly Duckling - ugly - revolting - beautiful - majestic - friendly Farmer Duck - exhausted - eject - stunned The Tiger Who Came to Tea - cautious - crouch - farewell - slurping

- delicious The Magic Porridge Pot - enchanted - despair - steaming - goochy - conversation Mr Benn - capture - tearful - forlorn - shelter	- guzzle - frosty - perfect - cramped Popeye - weakness - rapid - dreadful - superhuman	- flimsy - sturdy - scarper - exhale - celebrate Trapdoor - smuggle - miniature - grasp - dozing	- forty winks - snooze - devious The Magic Roundabout - greeting - racing - agitated - shy	- revolting - brave - decision Jack and the Beanstalk - booming - clambering - descending - chopping Captain Pugwash - joyful - lost - beware - observe - nervous	Where the wild things are - navigate - evade - irritated - disembark Dear Zoo - captured - slippery - disapprove - elongated
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Vocabulary in Poetry Basket

Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Buster the Fly - glum - heaving - sigh	Five Little Pumpkins - late - witches - tumbled	Hickory Dickory Dock - Struck - Tick tock Popcorn	Bees - Buzz - Hover - Land	Incy Wincy Spider - Water spout - Washed - Dried	1,2,3,4,5 Once I caught a fish alive - alive - bit

• noticed A Little House • chimneys • curling • drifting • sight • snug Mice • nibble • rather A Little Shell • tapped • upon • answer • crept The Fox • smart • sly • bushy • tree trunk Five Little Owls • elm tree • fluffy • puffy • beneath	• sight Pointy Hat • old • pointed • rat-a-tat-tat • peered Who Has Seen the Wind? • Trembling • Bow • Passing by A Basket of Apples • Rosy red • Shiny • Oval • Sour • Sweet Pitter Patter • Window pane • Softly • Stream • Cool The Thunderstorm • Boom • Bang	• Sizzling • Shake Shoes • Dim • Lonesome • Tossed • Friendly • Pair Spring Wind • Spring • Gruff • Growly • Mittens • Blowing • Gentle Rabbit • Fluffy • Pointy • 'black as coal • Trembled • Scuttled Alligator Pie • Alligator • Cry	• Hour • Shower I have a Little Frog • Bathtub • Gobbled • Bubbles Pancakes • Mix • Stir • Fry • Toss • Catch Hungry Birdies • Nest • Beaks • Wide • Spread Stepping Stones • Stepping stones • River • Fast • Across • Reach Crayon Poem	• Climbed Leaves are Falling • Falling • Leaves Monkey Babies • Swamp • Chomp • Breeze • Wrap • Squeeze • Track • Lurking • Snack • Fleas Creepy Crawlies • Creepy crawly • Bug • Shrug • Settled • Mighty • Scuttled • Snore Caterpillar • Wriggle	• right Rain • splash • raindrop • trickled • rude Flowers • lying • shining • overhead • 'to and fro • Wakens Digging • Rake • Weeds • Stems • Climb • Blossom Leaves are Green • Hang • Above • Alone • Frosty • Weather Icicles
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• hooted	• Rumpety, lumpety • Rustles, bustles • Swishes		• Crayons • Crazy • Raindrops • Golden • Rainbow	• Sound • Cocoon • Caterpillar • Butterfly Springtime • Log • Bluegreen lake • listened	• Icicles • Melting • Teardrops • Falling
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Vocabulary in Continuous Provision

Vocabulary should be embedded across the environment rather than restricted to adult-led sessions.

Construction

design, build, construct, join, balance, structure, strong, weak, stable, unstable, improve

Role Play

character, pretend, imagine, customer, patient, visitor, helper, appointment, conversation, question

Small World

journey, travel, explore, village, town, forest, habitat, shelter, rescue, adventure

Creative

create, design, pattern, colour, texture, shade, mix, blend, print, collage, sculpture

Outdoor Learning

observe, investigate, discover, search, collect, compare, habitat, shelter, environment, natural

Water

float, sink, pour, splash, full, empty, container, heavy, light, absorb, waterproof

Maths

more, fewer, equal, greater, smaller, pair, whole, half, pattern, sequence, compare

Vocabulary Retention

New vocabulary should not be introduced and then abandoned. Staff should deliberately revisit important vocabulary throughout the year.

Same day

Hear → discuss → use

Same week

Revisit in story, play or provision

Following weeks

Use in a different context

Following terms

Retrieve and apply

Children should encounter important vocabulary **multiple times and in different contexts** before it is considered secure.

Adult Vocabulary Expectations

Adults will:

- model ambitious vocabulary naturally and accurately;
- avoid unnecessarily simplifying language;
- explain unfamiliar words in child-friendly language;
- use new vocabulary repeatedly;
- encourage children to use new words themselves;
- extend children's sentences;
- ask open-ended questions;
- provide thinking time;
- introduce synonyms and related vocabulary;
- make links between words and children's experiences;
- revisit vocabulary through stories, songs, rhymes and play.

Adults should prioritise **quality over quantity**. A smaller number of carefully selected words, revisited regularly and used meaningfully, is more effective than teaching large lists of isolated vocabulary.

Vocabulary Progression: End-of-Reception Expectations

By the end of Reception, children should increasingly be able to:

- understand and use a growing range of vocabulary;
- use new vocabulary from stories and experiences in their own speech;
- describe people, objects, places and events using increasingly precise language;
- explain their ideas using connected sentences;
- use vocabulary relating to time and sequence;
- use language to predict and explain;
- talk about their thoughts, feelings and experiences;
- retell familiar stories using appropriate vocabulary;
- use story language during imaginative play;
- ask and answer questions;
- explain the meaning of some familiar words;
- make connections between new vocabulary and words they already know;
- use vocabulary to support problem-solving, reasoning and discussion.

Key Principle

In Reception, vocabulary is taught through meaningful experiences, rich stories, purposeful conversation and play. Children need to hear words repeatedly, understand them in context and have genuine opportunities to use them.