FREE PRINTABLE PDF

10 Practical Speech and Language Activities
for Teaching Assistants

Ready-to-use classroom activities, picture prompts and worksheets for primary school communication support.



10 CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES | 4 PRINTABLE WORKSHEETS | RECEPTION TO YEAR 6

Support listening, vocabulary, sentence building, storytelling and everyday communication - with simple steps and adaptable options.

A PRACTICAL TOOLKIT FOR THE SCHOOL DAY

Print a page. Choose a goal. Adapt the activity to the pupil.

For teaching assistants, classroom staff and SEN support teams. Use alongside the teacher's agreed plans and any guidance from a speech and language therapist.

HOW TO USE THIS PACK

Start small. Keep it meaningful.

Choose one activity that matches what the pupil is working towards.

These activities are designed for everyday classroom communication practice. They do not assess, diagnose or replace a pupil-specific therapy programme.

A SIMPLE FOUR-STEP ROUTINE

01

Choose a goal

Ask the class teacher or SENCO which skill to practise.

02

Prepare

Pick 2-5 objects, pictures or words and a quiet space.

03

Model and practise

Show an example, give thinking time and welcome any communication method.

04

Notice and share

Write down what helped and feed back to the teacher.

USE WHAT ALREADY WORKS FOR THE PUPIL

Follow existing SEND support plans, visual systems and AAC arrangements. If a speech and language therapist has specified a task, follow that guidance rather than substituting a general activity.

Good to know: Many pupils communicate through pointing, gesture, pictures, signing or AAC. A useful response does not always have to be spoken.

EVERYDAY CLASSROOM SUPPORT

Five strategies that make activities easier

Small changes in adult language can make instructions and conversations more accessible.

1 **ONE STEP AT A TIME**

Instead of: “Put away your book, get your ruler and start the worksheet.”

Try: “Put your book away.” Then give the next step.

2 **SHOW AS WELL AS SAY**

Instead of relying only on spoken instructions.

Try pointing to the object, showing a picture or demonstrating the action.

3 **GIVE PROCESSING TIME**

Instead of repeating the question immediately.

Try asking once, pausing, then rephrasing or offering a visual cue if needed.

4 **MODEL USEFUL LANGUAGE**

Instead of insisting on a perfect response.

Try building on the child's message: “Dog run” becomes “Yes, the dog is running.”

5 **WELCOME DIFFERENT RESPONSES**

Instead of requiring an answer to be spoken.

Try allowing a pupil to point, select a symbol, gesture or use AAC.

In practice, follow the pupil's existing communication plan and ask for advice when an activity is not working.

CHOOSE YOUR ACTIVITY

Find the right activity

Select by communication focus, not just by age. Adjust the challenge to the individual pupil.

NO.	ACTIVITY	MAIN FOCUS	TIME
01	Follow the Instructions	Listening	5-10 min
02	What Am I Describing?	Describing	10 min
03	Put the Story in Order	Storytelling	10-15 min
04	Three New Words	Vocabulary	10 min
05	Who, What and Where?	Questions	10 min
06	Draw What I Say	Descriptions	10-15 min
07	Sort and Explain	Categories	10 min
08	Build a Better Sentence	Sentences	10 min
09	Take Turns and Keep Talking	Conversation	10 min
10	Asking for Help and Choices	Requests	5-10 min

QUICK PLANNING TIP

Use a familiar topic from the current lesson - books, science, geography, food or routines. A child may need fewer words, more pictures or more time; the activity can still be successful.

Times are flexible suggestions, not prescribed intervention schedules.

ACTIVITY 01 / UNDERSTANDING SPOKEN DIRECTIONS

Follow the Instructions

Listening and understanding | 5-10 minutes | One pupil or small group

GOAL

Support pupils to follow short, meaningful instructions using everyday classroom objects.



WHAT YOU NEED

A book, two coloured pencils, a ruler and a small box or tray.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Start with a single clear action: **"Pick up the red pencil."** Give thinking time.
2. When ready, add a location word: **"Put the pencil beside the book."** Model once if useful.
3. For pupils ready for a greater challenge, try two steps: **"Pick up the ruler and put it in the box."**
4. Change the objects and roles so the pupil can give a direction too.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

Adult: "Put the blue pencil under the book."
Pupil: follows the direction or shows what they understood.
Adult: "Yes, it is under the book."

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Begin with one instruction; show the object, use gestures or a visual choice. Do not increase the number of steps until the pupil is ready.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Note whether the pupil responds independently, after a model, or with a picture or gesture.

TRY IT NOW | THREE CLASSROOM DIRECTIONS

Touch the book.

Put the pencil on the book.

Give the ruler to your partner.

ACTIVITY 02 / NAMING FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

What Am I Describing?

Descriptive vocabulary | 10 minutes | One pupil or pair

GOAL

Build vocabulary by talking about what an object looks like, does and belongs with.



WHAT YOU NEED

Four familiar objects or picture cards: apple, cup, ball and pencil.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Choose one object. Model two or three clues without naming it.
2. Include a feature, a category and a use: **“It is round. It is a fruit. We eat it.”**
3. Ask the pupil to point to or name the object, then swap roles.
4. Extend with questions such as **“What is it made of?”** or **“Where would you find it?”**

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

“It has pages. You read it. It can tell a story.”
Answer: book.
“What else could we say about a book?”

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Offer two choices, a sentence strip (“It is...”; “You use it to...”) or time to select an AAC symbol.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Look for new descriptive words, accurate features or clearer ways of identifying an object.

TRY IT NOW | BUILD A CLUE

It looks like:
_____

You use it for:
_____

It belongs with: _____

ACTIVITY 03 / BEGINNING, MIDDLE AND END

Put the Story in Order

Sequencing and storytelling | 10-15 minutes | One pupil or group

GOAL

Practise ordering events and sharing a simple sequence using words, pictures or AAC.



WHAT YOU NEED

Three picture cards or drawings showing events in a familiar routine.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Show three pictures mixed up. Name the actions together.
2. Ask which picture happened first; place it on the left.
3. Complete the sequence using **first, next** and **last**.
4. Encourage a retell: the pupil may speak, point, gesture or use a communication aid.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

First: We plant a seed.
Next: We water the soil.
Last: A plant begins to grow.

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Start with two events or use real photographs of the class routine. Offer “first/next/last” cards.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Observe sequencing, use of connecting words and how independently the pupil communicates events.

TRY IT NOW | A SCHOOL-DAY SEQUENCE

First: arrive at school	Next: hang up your coat	Last: sit down for registration

ACTIVITY 04 / MAKING CURRICULUM WORDS FAMILIAR

Three New Words Before the Lesson

Pre-teaching vocabulary | 10 minutes | One pupil or group

GOAL

Introduce a few important lesson words so pupils can recognise and use them in context.



WHAT YOU NEED

Three words from an upcoming lesson, picture cues or real objects, and page 16.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Ask the teacher which three words will matter most in the next lesson.
2. Say each word, explain it simply and connect it to a picture, action or known word.
3. Use the word in a short sentence and invite the pupil to respond in their preferred way.
4. Revisit the words during and after the lesson rather than testing once.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

Science - the water cycle:
Evaporate: water changes into vapour.
Condense: vapour cools into liquid water.
Precipitation: water falls from clouds as rain, snow or hail.

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Use one word at a time, a concrete example, visual support or the pupil's home language where appropriate.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Record whether the pupil recognises, explains or uses a word in meaningful context.

TRY IT NOW | CHOOSE TODAY'S WORDS

Word 1: _____

Word 2: _____

Word 3: _____

ACTIVITY 05 / UNDERSTANDING SIMPLE QUESTIONS

Who, What and Where?

Question comprehension | 10 minutes | One pupil or pair

GOAL

Support pupils to respond to questions about people, actions and places in pictures.



WHAT YOU NEED

An illustration from a class book or a simple school scene.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Choose a clear picture. Allow time for the pupil to look.
2. Ask one question: **"Who is here?"** Accept a name, point or symbol.
3. Then ask **"What are they doing?"** and **"Where are they?"** with support as needed.
4. Model a slightly fuller response and revisit another picture later.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

Picture: a child reading on a bench.
Who? A child.
What? Reading a book.
Where? On a bench.

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Practise one question type at a time. Use two picture choices or pre-teach "who/what/where".

WHAT TO NOTICE

Notice which kinds of questions are easier and the prompts that help the pupil respond.

TRY IT NOW | QUESTIONS FOR ANY PICTURE

Who can you see?	What is happening?	Where is it happening?

ACTIVITY 06 / LOCATION WORDS AND CLEAR MESSAGES

Draw What I Say

Listening and describing | 10-15 minutes | Pairs or one pupil

GOAL

Practise understanding descriptions that include position, size, colour and detail.



WHAT YOU NEED

Paper, pencils and a simple shape or classroom picture.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Keep a simple drawing hidden. Describe one element: **“Draw a big square.”**
2. Add another: **“Draw a small circle above the square.”**
3. Compare drawings and check which instructions were easy to follow.
4. Swap roles so the pupil can describe and the adult can draw.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

“Draw a house in the middle. Put a sun above the house. Draw a tree to the left.”
Review the words **above** and **left**.

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Use two shapes and a model first. Offer printed shapes to place rather than requiring drawing.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Observe understanding of position words and how clearly messages are shared.

TRY IT NOW | YOUR SECRET PICTURE

One large shape:
_____

Something above it:
_____

Something beside it:
_____

ACTIVITY 07 / MAKING LINKS BETWEEN WORDS

Sort and Explain

Word categories and meanings | 10 minutes | Pairs or small group

GOAL

Help pupils identify categories, compare items and explain why pictures belong together.



WHAT YOU NEED

Picture cards from page 15 or a collection of classroom objects.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Lay out six familiar pictures and introduce two groups.
2. Ask the pupil to sort them, for example **food** and **classroom objects**.
3. Talk about a choice: **"Why does the apple go with the banana?"**
4. Add a different category, or invite the pupil to choose their own rule.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

Apple + banana = fruit.
Book + pencil = school things.
"They belong together because..."

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Begin with only four cards or model the first two.
Accept matching, pointing or single-word reasons.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Record whether the pupil identifies the group and can show or explain the link.

TRY IT NOW | TWO CATEGORIES

Group A: _____

Group B: _____

My sorting rule: _____

ACTIVITY 08 / ADDING MEANINGFUL INFORMATION

Build a Better Sentence

Sentence building | 10 minutes | One pupil or pair

GOAL

Help pupils build sentences with who, action, place and other useful details.



WHAT YOU NEED

Pictures showing clear actions and optional sentence starter strips.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Show a familiar action picture and model a short sentence.
2. Ask one expansion question: **"Where is the boy running?"**
3. Add the new detail and say the full sentence naturally.
4. Repeat with another picture, choosing an appropriate level of detail.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

Start: "The boy runs."
Add where: "The boy runs in the playground."
Add how: "The boy runs quickly in the playground."

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Offer word or picture choices; expand a short response without requiring repetition.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Notice meaningful added details, clearer word order or use of a sentence support.

TRY IT NOW | BUILD A SENTENCE

Who?
_____

Doing what?
_____

Where?
_____

ACTIVITY 09 / SHARED INTERESTS AND RESPONSES

Take Turns and Keep Talking

Conversation and interaction | 10 minutes | Pairs or small group

GOAL

Create opportunities for comfortable, reciprocal interaction through a shared activity.



WHAT YOU NEED

A simple turn-taking game, objects or pictures based on pupil interests.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Choose an activity the pupil enjoys, such as choosing cards or playing a short game.
2. Model a turn and comment on what happened, without overwhelming with questions.
3. Pause for the pupil to contribute in their own way. Respond to their message.
4. Swap turns and model a related comment or question if helpful.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

Adult: “I chose the blue card.”
Pupil: points to green.
Adult: “You chose green. Shall we see what is underneath?”

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Use predictable turn cues; allow extra time, gesture or AAC. Never insist on eye contact.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Observe participation, initiation and how the pupil contributes to a shared exchange.

TRY IT NOW | CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Which would you choose?
- What happened next?
- What shall we try together?

ACTIVITY 10 / EXPRESSING NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

Asking for Help and Making Choices

Functional communication | 5-10 minutes | Everyday classroom routine

GOAL

Support meaningful communication for requesting help, choosing and signalling a need.



WHAT YOU NEED

Two genuine options, familiar objects or the pupil's existing choice/AAC system.

HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY

1. Offer a real choice within a familiar routine, such as reading or drawing.
2. Show two options and name each one clearly.
3. Give time for a spoken, gestured, pointed or AAC response; acknowledge the choice.
4. Model useful requests such as **"help"**, **"more"** or **"finished"** naturally.

SAY OR SHOW | WORKED EXAMPLE

Adult: "Would you like the book or the drawing activity?"
Pupil: points to the book.
Adult: "You chose the book. Let's read."

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Use a trusted visual choice board. Avoid withholding needed items, breaks or help to force a request.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Notice whether the pupil can communicate a preference or need with appropriate support.

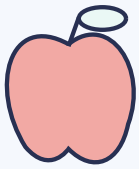
TRY IT NOW | USEFUL CLASSROOM CHOICES

Read / draw	Pencil / felt-tip pen	Work here / quieter space

CUT OUT AND KEEP

Printable picture prompt cards

Use these original cards for describing, sorting, asking questions and sentence building.



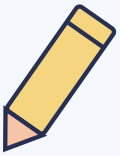
Apple



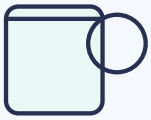
Banana



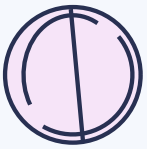
Book



Pencil



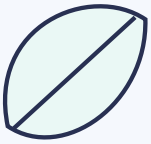
Cup



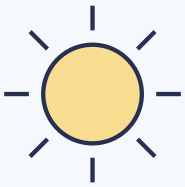
Ball



Bus



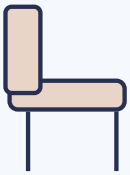
Leaf



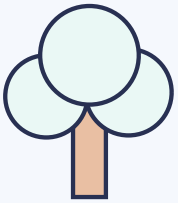
Sun



Clock



Chair



Tree

Print at actual size, cut along card edges and reuse with activities 2, 5, 7 and 8.

MAKE COPIES AS NEEDED

My New Word

Use this sheet before a lesson, then revisit the word in classroom talk.

WORD: _____

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

DRAW A PICTURE OR ADD A SYMBOL:

USE THE WORD IN A SENTENCE:

WHERE MIGHT YOU HEAR THIS WORD AGAIN?

WORKED EXAMPLE

Evaporate: Water changes into water vapour when it gains heat. **Example:** “Puddles can evaporate on a warm day.”

SEQUENCING AND STORIES

First. Next. Last.

Draw or stick a picture in each box, then tell the story in your own way.

FIRST What happens at the beginning?

Draw or add a picture here

My words:

NEXT What happens after that?

Draw or add a picture here

My words:

LAST How does it finish?

Draw or add a picture here

My words:

Talk about the story using “first”, “next” and “last”. Pupils can speak, point to each panel, gesture, sign or use AAC.

PRINT FOR SCHOOL USE

Communication activity record

A simple note for staff discussion, not a clinical assessment or diagnostic tool.

DATE: _____ **ACTIVITY:** _____

AGREED LEARNING GOAL: _____

WHAT SUPPORT DID THE PUPIL USE?

- ☐ Adult model
- ☐ Picture or object cues
- ☐ Extra time
- ☐ Established AAC/sign/gesture
- ☐ Other: _____

WHAT DID THE PUPIL COMMUNICATE OR DO?

WHAT HELPED? WHAT WAS DIFFICULT?

NEXT STEP OR POINT TO SHARE WITH THE TEACHER / SENCO:

Privacy note: Use a school-approved identifier rather than a pupil name on shared copies. Store completed records in line with school policy.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Keep communication at the heart of learning

Try one activity, notice what helps and use that information to plan the next opportunity.

A THREE-POINT CHECK-IN

- Did the pupil have time to respond?
- Were pictures, objects or their existing communication system available?
- What small adjustment could make the next activity easier?

FURTHER READING AND USEFUL GUIDANCE

Education Endowment Foundation

Oral language interventions - evidence on vocabulary, structured dialogue and curriculum-linked talk.

Open resource >

Speech and Language UK

Resource library for educators, including classroom communication strategies and visual support.

Open resource >

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Delegation guidance explaining the relationship between speech and language therapists and non-SLT staff.

Open resource >

KEEP BUILDING YOUR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Explore more teaching assistant and SEN learning resources with One Education.

Visit www.oneeducation.org.uk

Resource created by One Education for general classroom support. Last prepared: November 2026.