



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta  
Síceolaíochta Oideachais | National  
Educational  
Psychological Service

# Language Group Activities

Primary (4-10 years)



**This NEPS Good Practice Guide was developed by educational psychologists. It is based on current knowledge in this area. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the suggestions here will apply to any one student or situation.**

## Introduction

The 23 activities in this resource back are intended to be used by teachers and/ or parents to help develop the language skills of children, typically those in the age range 4-10 years, although they may also be useful with older children who require such language development. They are designed to be used with small groups of children. We expect that these activities will be of particular use to children receiving School Support or School Support Plus.

Many of the activities here require additional equipment such as story cards, sequencing pictures and small toys. It may be helpful to copy or print each activity onto card, laminate it and keep it with the relevant equipment in a large, clear zipped bag. A set of such activities can be kept in a plastic crate. Then a language group session might involve a group of children working through a range of activities that are stored together. Many children will benefit from revisiting activities over a number of sessions.



There are two other NEPS Good Practice Guides focusing on language skills:

- **Activities to Develop Expressive Language Skills** (typically for children aged 7-12 years)
- **Activities to Develop Receptive Language and Comprehension Skills** (typically for children aged 7-12 years)

### **Activity 1. Describing Pictures**

**Equipment** Large pictures of interesting scenes

**Activity** Hold up picture in front of the children.

Tell children you are thinking of something in the picture, and describe it by using clues of size, colour, function etc. Children have to guess what it is. They can take turns to choose something from the picture to describe.

Give one child the picture to look at and do not allow the other children to see it. Ask the child to describe what is in the picture in as much detail as possible. The other children can ask questions to get more information. Afterwards, the picture is displayed to all.

### **Activity 2. Tell Me Game**

**Activity** Ask ..... to tell you as much as possible in response to your questions  
e.g. Tell me how you get to school?  
Tell me how you make a cup of tea?  
Tell me what you would do if you were suddenly changed into a Dog?

This can encourage imaginative thinking as well as organizing what he/she has to say in the correct sequential order.

### Activity 3. O' Grady Says or Simon Says

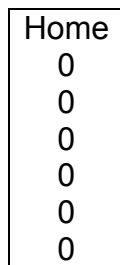
**Activity** Each child in turn to take the role of O' Grady and monitor the other children.

### Activity 4. Giving and Receiving Instructions

**Activity** Barrier Games  
2 children sit at either end of a table with a barrier between them. Take it in turns to give instructions to the other child. After each turn or after a few turns check you partner's performance:-  
e.g. Put the blue car in the red tin.  
Draw a small dog next to the tree.  
Draw a straight line up from the bottom, left hand corner.

### Activity 5. Get Home Game

**Equipment** Prepared cards of 6 coloured spots in a straight line i.e.



with home at the top. Each child needs one card and a counter. Pictures of objects, animals, toys, etc.

**Activity** Hold up card and ask each child to say one thing about the picture, e.g. for a bike, they might say, its got wheels, you ride it, etc. For each thing they say, they move their counter up one coloured spot. The game can be competitive, by seeing who gets 'home' first. Alternatively, each child can be given one picture to describe by themselves.

### **Activity 6. Sequential Picture Stories**

**Equipment** Story sequence pictures or cards.  
Plain paper folded to make a small book.

**Activity** 1. Go through the story sequence. Show one card at a time. Ask the children what they think will happen next, or would like to happen next. Discuss the story.

2. As 1. but tell the children they are going to write a story book. They tell you what to write in the “book”. Try to encourage imaginative vocabulary, without taking over! e.g. ask how characters feel. The children can draw pictures to go with the story, and can make a nice picture for the cover.

Story books without words can also be used, or comics with the writing in the bubble erased which the children fill in.

They might enjoy recording stories into a tape recorder.

### **Activity 7. Pretend Phone Conversations**

**Activity**

- How to make an appointment
- Order a pizza
- Ask what time a film is on
- Wish Grandpa ‘happy birthday’
- Tell Dad you’ll be late home
- Ask school when the trip is.

### **Activity 8. Role Plays**

- Activity**
- Role-plays (shops, restaurants, going on buses, etc).
  - Home situations- asking for a treat, asking for help etc

### **Activity 9. Descriptions**

**Equipment** Cut out pictures from a magazine, of everyday objects.

**Activity** Divide into 2 teams.  
The aim is for the team to give as many different words as possible to describe objects,  
e.g. a violin, an orange etc.

Each person in each team has to describe as many of these items to the rest of the team without showing them the picture or telling them the word.

How many did each team guess in 1 minute?

The next person in the team then takes over.

### **Activity 10. I Went to the Market and.....**

**Activity** Children play the game “I went to market and I bought...”. Each child has a turn at saying what they bought. They can be restricted to specific topics if wished.  
More able children can be asked to repeat the list of what other players bought.  
As a variation choose a place to visit, and each child has to think of an appropriate object to take e.g. “I’m going to the seaside and I’m going to take a towel”. etc..

### **Activity 11. Lateral Thinking**

**Activity**

For example:

- How many things can we do with a brick?
- What can we do with a stick?
- Name anything that has legs, buttons, etc.

### **Activity 12. Pragmatic (or Social) Skills**

**Activity**

These ideas can be carried out in small groups or with the whole class. Try talking about the communication in general and what makes a good communicator,  
i.e. looking at the person  
listening to the person  
talking at the correct volume  
keeping to the subject  
keeping at the correct distance.

Role-play good and poor conversation with the group. Can they identify what went wrong?

### **Activity 13. Words and Pictures**

**Equipment**

Picture or poster of winter or summer scene.

**Activity**

Children think up words to go with the scene, e.g. icy, snowy, freezing etc.  
Try to encourage short phrases as well, e.g. freezing fingers etc.  
Could make collage of words to stick around the picture.

### **Activity 14. Peg-Boards**

**Equipment** Coloured pegs and peg board.

**Activity**

- Giving and receiving instructions.
- Children can use folders to hide their boards.
- Adult gives instructions “Put red pegs in top row” etc.
- Can either describe pattern which adult also makes or pattern from pre-printed cards (these can be purchased from peg board suppliers).
- Children can take turn giving instructions.

### **Activity 15. Grab-Bag Guessing**

(For children of fairly high level language)

**Equipment** Bag of interesting objects, or toys provided by you or brought in by the children.

**Activity** Children take it in turns to choose an object, which is not seen by the rest of the people present. Child describes the object by giving clues about it, e.g. its metal, its used for eating etc. and others have to guess what it is.

This is quite a difficulty activity, and takes children a little bit of time to get the hang of it.

**Activity 16. Hypothetical Situations – What would you do if.....?**

**Activity** e.g. You lost your door key?  
You hadn't brought your mother a birthday present  
You wanted to earn some money. etc.

**Activity 17. Sequencing Skills**

**Equipment** Sequential Picture Cards

**Activity** These can be used in several different ways e.g.

1. You and child make the story together.
2. You ask the child to guess what will happen next.
3. Make a simple book, using the cards as a guide. Child draws a simple picture, and makes up a simple caption. If appropriate the child can think about feelings etc., that are involved.

### **Activity 18. Story Structure**

**Aim** Development of expressive skills.

**Equipment** LDA (or similar) story sequence pictures  
Plain paper folded to make a small book.

**Activity** Go through the story sequence. Show one card at a time.  
Ask the children what they think will happen next, or what would they like to happen next. Discuss the story.

As above, but tell the children they are going to write a story book. They tell you what to write in the “book”.

Try to encourage imaginative vocabulary, without taking over! Eg. Ask how characters feel.

The children can draw pictures to go with the story, and can make a nice picture for the cover.

Story books without words can also be used, or comics with the writing in the bubble erased which the children fill in.

They might enjoy recording stories into a tape recorder.

### **Activity 19. Hidden Picture/Object Description**

**Activity** Give clues for the rest of the group to guess what the object is:-  
e.g. It's alive,  
It flies,  
It has wings.

Give a point for each relevant guess.

## Activity 20. Vocabulary Comprehension

**Equipment** Pictures, visual lotto cards, visuals from the environment, classroom or outdoors

**Activity** Understand of target vocabulary can be further developed by talking about its characteristics. Later the child can be asked to identify objects according to function and attributes. Initially one feature only should be used.

e.g. “point to something which flies  
point to something you eat  
point to something you wear  
point to something you can build with  
point to something furry  
point to something which swims  
point to something which grows” etc...

Later this can be expanded to 2 features.

e.g. “point to something which flies and builds a nest  
point to something which you wear on your feet  
point to something you wear when cold  
point to a furry toy” etc...

This is a particularly useful “packing away” activity after picture /bingo when children can be asked to put away specified cards.



### **Activity 21. Sound following with instruments**

- Equipment** Musical instruments. Use four different musical instruments or if you haven't got four, use an improvised drum, a squeaker, a rattle and a whistle or any noise makers you can find that make quite different sounds.
- Activity**
- a) Make a sound with one instrument, either with all the instruments out of sight, or with the child's back turned, or with his eyes tight shut. The child then selects the one that makes the sound and he makes the sound himself to confirm it was the same.
  - b) Repeat this game but this time make two sounds. The child then has to make the two sounds in the same order.
  - c) Do the same as a) and b) but try three sounds out of four.
  - d) Use four instruments and repeat a) to c).

### **Activity 22. Sound following with shakers**

- Equipment** Fine eight matchboxes or similar pots and put, for example, some beads into 2, sand into 2, a small brick into 2 and some paper clips into the last 2. You then have two identical sets of shakers. Try to use things which make very different sounds at first and make sure you cannot see inside the pots.
- Activity**
- a) Give one set to the child and keep one. Shake one of your pots and then ask your child to try and find the same one in his set by shaking them all in turn and listening. Ask him to close his eyes while you change the position of all the pots and try to match a different one.  
N.B. If you cannot find enough matching pots, put things in different pairs of pots and shake yours out of sight so he is still matching just by listening.
  - b) Increase the number of pots used in both sets.
  - c) Shake two pots from your set and ask the child to find the same two from his set.

### Activity 23. Following sequenced instructions

**Equipment** Objects & Pictures  
Use things the children know well e.g. car, comb, spoon, cup, key, pen, shoe, hook, etc  
Numbered paper

**Activity**

- a) Put six objects or pictures on the table and ask “Give me the book and the cup.”
- b) Make it slightly more difficult by asking for three things e.g. “Give me the shoe, the sock and the pen.”
- c) Use the same objects but this time give a short instruction e.g. “Put the shoe in the sink and the pen under the bed.” Try to make them unusual so he cannot anticipate them. You can also try hiding two things in unusual places and give the child the instruction for finding them e.g. “Find the pencil in the fridge and the slipper on the mantelpiece.”

Give the child two small objects e.g. toy cars, farm animals etc. to hold. Put a piece of paper out in front of him marked as follows:

1	2
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Ask him to put the objects down on the paper in the order you say e.g. “Put down the car then the pen.” Point to 1 as you say car and 2 as you say pen. When he is good at this try just giving the names, “Horse, cat” and don’t point to the numbers.

- d) Use three objects and paper marked 1 2 3 and repeat as above.
- e) Once you have modeled this activity, one of the children in the group can be the person to give instructions, while another child follows.