



Assessing Expressive Language: A Language Sample

A language sample is a record of the words your child says spontaneously. For this assessment, it does not matter if those words are clearly spoken. What your child says (expressive language) is more important than how clearly he is saying the words (speech). You can use a language sample to celebrate your child’s progress and to set future language goals.

A language sample can be informal – the result of hearing your youngster use language spontaneously in a familiar situation. Also it can be formal – taken during a planned, structured activity.

To take a “formal” language sample find a time when your little one is at his most talkative. Is it when he is playing with his toys? Maybe he talks most when you are playing a game together. He may be quite the talker at a meal when the whole family can be involved. You don’t need to use only one conversation for your language sample -- use various situations if you want. But since you are going to collect a sample of everything

Here is an example of a language sample:

| Language sample | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Date: | August 22 |
| Timmy’s Age: | 2 years 4 months |
| Situation: | I was putting groceries in the car. |
| Timmy’s Language: | “Open door.” |
| Date: | August 27 |
| Timmy’s Age: | 2 years 4 months |
| Situation: | I planned to have Timmy help me make pudding. I recorded him. |
| Timmy’s Language: | “Open milk,” “No spoon,” “Where cup?” |



your child says during the chosen activity, you will want to record what he says or have another person write it down.

Here’s how to begin. Write down exactly what your child says either as he is speaking or from your recording. Listen carefully. Often our minds will fill in words that a child leaves out. We hear, “Throw the ball” when your child may actually have said, “Throw ball.” Or, he might say, “my” instead of “It’s mine.” It is most important that you only write what he says. And remember, his speech might sound like, “tro ba” but you are going to write the actual words, “throw ball.” What he says is important now, not how he says it. Imitated words and phrases are not included here.

Try to gather at least 50 “utterances.” If you keep copies of all your child’s formal and informal test results, you will want to add a new section: Expressive Language. Over time, you will notice an increase in your child’s sentences and how complex the length of your child’s language is becoming! You will also want to share this Language Sample with your child’s teacher/therapist. It might be helpful in establishing language goals and tracking his improvement. Do this on a regular basis and hear how he progresses.