Developing Language and Vocabulary through reading and high quality talk

How many words does your child know? It’s fairly easy to tally them up when they’re just beginning to speak, but harder to calculate the size of their vocabulary as they hit school age and beyond.

**What’s known, though, is that having a wide vocabulary sets your child up for life.**

‘A child’s vocabulary is a big predictor of their future success,’ says Alice Penfold, Project Manager of the [Words for Work programme](https://literacytrust.org.uk/programmes/words-for-work/) at the [National Literacy Trust](https://literacytrust.org.uk/). ‘It not only affects their chances of performing well in exams, but also their life chances.

‘For example, children who have a poor vocabulary at the age of five are four times more likely to struggle with reading as adults, and three times more prone to [mental health](https://www.theschoolrun.com/talking-to-kids-about-mental-health) issues.’

With this in mind, it’s well worth making an effort to build your child’s vocabulary. But how can you tell whether they know the right number of words for their age?**ld your child know?**

All children develop at different rates, so it’s impossible to say how many words your child ‘should’ know at a certain age. However, the figures below can be used as a guide.

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| --- | --- |
| 12-18 months | 20 words |
| 2 years | 200-300 words |
| 3 years | 900-1,000 words |
| 4 years | 1,500-1,600 words |
| 5 years | 2,100-2,200 words |
| 6 years | 2,600 words expressive vocabulary (words they can use) 20,000-24,000 words receptive vocabulary (words they understand) |
| 12 years | 50,000 words receptive vocabulary |

Evidently, you’re not going to be able to count exactly how many words your child knows, but there are ways to gauge whether their vocabulary development is on track for their age. **wo**

Young children are like sponges, soaking up new words, and noticing your child using a greater range of words is a good measure of how their vocabulary is developing.

‘Children aged three to five can typically acquire four to six new words per day: a helpful benchmark of whether their language development is on track,’ says Alice. **the world around them**

‘One of the best ways to tell if your child is developing vocabulary at the right rate is to listen to how they talk,’ explains Year 4 teacher Jack Phillips, who blogs about vocabulary at [verbivoreteacher.com](https://verbivoreteacher.com/).

‘Listen to how well they describe the world around them, and the range of words they use. Do they take an interest and talk about what’s going on? Are they willing to engage in conversation? How do they tell you about their day at school?**Reading at the right level for their age**

Take a look at books that are aimed at your child’s age group, and see whether they are able to read at this level.

‘It’s important to look at whether they’re taking in the information, as **some children are very fluent readers but their**[**comprehension**](https://www.theschoolrun.com/english/reading-comprehension)**isn’t at the same level**,’ Jack explains. ‘Doing a bit of questioning about what they’re reading, such as asking them to sum up the last paragraph they read, will help you see whether they’re understanding the words on the page.’

Your child’s [reading scheme](https://www.theschoolrun.com/school-reading-schemes-explained) level is a good indicator of whether they’re acquiring new words at the right rate, but also check out the books that children their age are [reading for pleasure](https://www.theschoolrun.com/leisure-time/reading-for-pleasure) and see whether your child has a big enough vocabulary to access them.

**ames**

A good test of your child’s vocabulary is to engage them in [word games](https://www.theschoolrun.com/best-word-games-for-children). Try thinking of words (hot, high, fast, bright etc) and challenging your child to tell you the opposite word (the [antonym](https://www.theschoolrun.com/what-are-synonyms-and-antonyms)): they should be able to do this by the age of seven, or thereabouts.

**Jokes are also a good way to see how your child’s vocabulary is developing.** By 11, for example, they’re likely to have an understanding of how puns (jokes that exploit the different possible meanings of a word) work.

**nd writing for pleasure**

It stands to reason that if your child doesn’t have a good basic vocabulary, they’ll find reading and writing hard work.

‘Children who read for pleasure are 67% more likely to write at the expected level for their age,’ explains Alice. ‘If your child reads and writes purely for enjoyment, it’s a good indicator of their vocabulary.’**st results**

A reliable way to tell whether your child has the right vocabulary for their age is to look at their test results.

**At the end of**[**Year 2**](https://www.theschoolrun.com/sats/sats-year-2) **your child will take SATs, and you will be told whether they are at or exceeding the expected level for their age.** If they are ‘working towards’ the expected level in their English tests, it may indicate that their vocabulary could do with a boost.**g to their conversations**

‘One of the best ways to tell whether your child has a good vocabulary is to overhear how they talk to their peers in the playground, on [playdates](https://www.theschoolrun.com/playdate-hell) or on sleepovers,’ says Jack.

‘They all develop at different rates, but are they using similar language to their friends? Can they talk about their emotions? These are good tests of their language acquisition.’