



AMERICAN  
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-  
HEARING  
ASSOCIATION

# Literacy

## Speech-Language Pathologists Play a Pivotal Role

Literacy is an essential prerequisite for social well being, academic achievement and lifetime opportunities. Language problems are both a cause and a consequence of literacy problems in children and adolescents. Because of this, speech-language pathologists play important roles in ensuring that all children gain access to appropriate instruction in reading, writing, and spelling—so that no child is left behind. These roles include the following:

- Early Identification & Assessment
- Intervention
- Development of Literacy Programs

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) recently released a 68-page report on literacy entitled *Guidelines for the Roles and Responsibilities of Speech-Language Pathologists with Respect to Reading and Writing in Children and Adolescents*. This report highlights the direct roles and responsibilities of speech-language pathologists in the development of reading and writing among children and adolescents, particularly in developing literacy for younger children who have communication disorders,<sup>1</sup> including those with severe or multiple disabilities. The report concludes that speech-language pathologists can make a significant contribution to the literacy efforts of a school district or community.

The ASHA Literacy Report outlines the professional knowledge and skills that enable speech-language pathologists to make unique contributions on collaborative teams of educators and other specialists concerned with helping all individuals become competent, literate, language users. It also documents that speech-language pathologists play a critical and direct role in the development of literacy for children and adolescents based on established connections between spoken and written language.

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<sup>1</sup> The scope of practice for SLPs includes literacy identification, assessment, and intervention for children, adolescents, and adults who have developmental or acquired communication disorders.

**Appropriate roles and responsibilities for speech-language pathologists** in the improvement of literacy in children include, but are not limited to:

- **Early Identification:** (a) help teachers and other professionals with early recognition of language factors associated with later literacy problems; (b) collaborate with other professionals to identify risk factors; (c) participate on child study teams; and (d) consult with government agencies, teachers, school administrators, and other health professionals on indications, timing, need and use of diagnostic assessments.
- **Literacy Intervention:** responsibilities involve providing direct intervention and collaborative assistance to general education teachers, students, and parents that is needs- and research-based, culturally and developmentally appropriate, and curriculum-relevant. The report gives examples of intervention program activities for children and adolescents in early childhood, early elementary, later elementary, and secondary programs.
- **Identification of Literacy Problems Among Older Students:** (a) educate other professionals regarding risk factors involving all language systems; (b) participate on child study teams; (c) recognize added literacy risks for children being treated for spoken language difficulties; (d) interview students, parents, and teachers about curriculum-based language difficulties; (e) monitor classroom progress and other factors that justify formal referral for assessment; and (f) suggest assessment strategies to identify whether a language difference or disorder might be at the root of literacy challenges.
- **Research:** (a) formulate questions to inform practice in literacy and design strategies for answering them; (b) bridge gaps between research and practice; and (c) participate in collaborative research teams that include academicians and practitioners.

For more information about ASHA and speech-language pathologists' role in literacy, please contact Neil Snyder of ASHA's Government Relations and Public Policy team at 202-624-7750 or via email at [nsnyder@asha.org](mailto:nsnyder@asha.org), or Roseanne Clausen of ASHA's Speech-Language Pathology Practices team at 301-897-5700 ext. 4181, or via email at [rclausen@asha.org](mailto:rclausen@asha.org). Visit our Web site at <http://professional.asha.org>. To view the full ASHA report on literacy, go to <http://professional.asha.org/slp/images/litguide.pdf>