

**DIPLOMA IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION  
(D.El.Ed.)**

***Course-503***

***Learning Languages at Elementary Level***

**Block -2**

**Skills Associated with Language Learning**



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## *Block 2*

### *Skills Associated with Language Learning*

#### ***Block Units***

*Unit 4 Listening and Speaking*

*Unit 5 Reading*

*Unit 6 Writing*

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## **BLOCK INTRODUCTION**

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**Unit 4 & 5** talks about Listening ,Speaking and Reading skills and the **6 unit** is devoted to writing skills. In all the units we will notice that children make mistakes while learning a language because that is an essential phase of language learning process; their errors are indicative of their knowledge and not of their ignorance. We have to understand whether our focus should be on language acquisition or the contents of the texts that are used for language acquisition in textbooks.

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## UNIT 4 LISTENING AND SPEAKING

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### STRUCTURE

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### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit we noted that children are able to easily learn more than one language, being spoken in their home environment. This is possible because they get ample opportunities to speak and listen to these languages. We also learnt that this can be true for those languages which are to be learnt by children in school, if they are given enough opportunities to speak and listen to these languages.

In this unit, we will talk about listening and speaking skills. We will try to understand: What do we mean by listening and speaking and how these skills are helpful in learning language? Along with this we will also understand a teacher's perspective towards these skills, while teaching language.



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## 4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit you will be able to:

- understand the meaning of listening-speaking;
- understand the role of listening-speaking in the process of language teaching-learning;
- identify the desirable roles and responsibility of the teacher for teaching these skills; and
- understand the importance of accuracy and fluency in the process of speaking

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## 4.2 LISTENING AND SPEAKING

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When children start going to school, they are given a lot of practice in listening and speaking in the initial 2-3 months. This is done in various ways and prominent among these is the teacher reading out poems, songs, numbers, letters etc., to children and children repeating, word-to-word, after the teacher.

The expectation is that children rote-memorize the lesson, even if they do not understand what they are speaking. They are thus made to continuously repeat the lesson till the time they are able to memorize it.

The teachers obviously believe that through such an activity of repeatedly speaking and listening to the same sounds, children will be able to memorize them. Teachers have an unshakeable belief that a child cannot learn new sentences or words if the particular word or sentence is not spoken to her. It implies that “a child first listens and then speaks”.

However, listening and speaking are parallel processes. When you are speaking something, then you are also listening to yourself. Sometimes we are only listening, for example when we are listening to the news on TV, radio, etc. But this consumption of news is also not like the one done by a tape recorder which records everything that is spoken and can repeat word-to-word. Another significant characteristic of our listening-speaking mechanism ‘understands’. Without ‘understanding’ we cannot carry forward a dialogue. This is clear if we think about how we talk over a telephone. We first listen to the person on the other side, try to understand what she is saying, and then respond to her; without understanding we cannot carry on with the conversation.

So in order to learn a language, we cannot look at these skills separately. These are mutually dependant skills wherein the processes of thinking and understanding are intertwined.



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**Check Your Progress-1**

1. What is a significant part of listening- speaking?

- a) listening                      b) speaking
- c) understanding                d) receiving information

2. What is the difference between the process of listening-speaking and the process of receiving information?

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3. What kind of opportunities are given to children to listen and speak usually, in the earlier classes in schools? Are these opportunities sufficient? Give your opinion.

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4. Your friend will be unable to listen to today's morning news on AIR. She has asked you to listen to it and tell it to her. What will you tell her? What will you be required to do in order to accomplish the above task?

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**4.2.1 WHAT IS LISTENING?**

We hear various kinds of sounds in our environment – these include sounds produced by humans, machines, animals etc. However, all these sounds we hear do not hold meaning for us. For example, the sound produced by a turned on machine (which we may hate) or a chirping bird (which we may enjoy) have no meaning for us.

The act of listening essentially includes meaning. While having a conversation the listener has to instantly make sense of the conversation. She does this in two ways and these have been discussed below in detail.

First, the listener understands the dialogue based on its words. This essentially



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refers to decoding of words, clauses, sentences and text. The listener needs to be aware of the meaning of words and the arrangement or pattern in which they would appear in the sentence. Let us understand this through an example—supposing a friend invites you to his house for dinner and you have never seen his house. On calling him, he guides you:

‘Take a right into the 3rd street from City Centre. Keep going straight and then take a left, into the lane housing Bawarchi Hotel. The third house in the lane is mine.’

In order to locate the house, you keep repeating the dialogue (verbatim) in our mind while in the process of locating the house. In this process your complete attention is on the dialogue and you know that you should follow the sequence of instructions. In this we divide the dialogue into small fragments like (third street from City Centre, take a right, go straight, take a left, Bawarchi Hotel lane, third house), decode them and understand the dialogue. In this whole process, the ability to recognize the key fragments/phrases of the sentence as well as the relationship between them is very important and comes with persistence.

In order to understand a statement in this manner, the listener should be well versed with a rich vocabulary and sentence structure. A consistent practice of this process helps in acquiring the following skills:

- To listen to a sentence carefully
- To recognize the key words
- To understand the grammatical relationship between the key words and sentences
- To understand the relevance of any stress and pause that the speaker uses, for example to identify a key word.

The second way in which we understand the sentence is based on our previous knowledge. While the process of understanding meaning based on words takes us from word to meaning the process of understanding meaning based on previous knowledge, takes us from meaning to words. For this we need previous knowledge, which may be based on some conversation, experience, reading etc.

For example if I hear during news time ‘Last night a furious earthquake hit China’, the word ‘earthquake’ raises a set of questions in my mind, like:

- How intense was the earthquake?
- How many people died or were injured?
- What kind of damage did it cause to property?
- What relief work is being carried out?





All these questions help us in understanding the aforesaid statement. Thus, we are able to understand the meaning of the sentence with minimum information; our prior knowledge plays an important role in this. The minimum information that this statement provides is that an earthquake has hit China and the time that this event occurred. Our previous knowledge which could have come from what we have seen, heard or read about earthquakes helped us raise the above questions and understand the meaning of 'an earthquake hitting China'. If a listener is unable to understand meaning through this process, then either the dialogue is incomplete or she does not have any previous knowledge about earthquakes. The practice of this process helps in acquiring the following skills:

To make sense of the conversation based on key words

- Raise questions about the situation
- Estimate the cause and effect relationship
- Estimate the unsaid details of a situation

Both these processes run in parallel while listening . The responsibility of deciding the extent to which each process will be used will depend upon how familiar the listener is with what is being talked about, the depth of information, the type of the information and the listener's purpose of listening.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1. *In how many ways do we understand meaning while listening?*

- (a) one
- (b) three
- (c) two
- (d) four

2. *How do we build meaning when we understand a dialogue based on words? Explain with an example.*

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3. *What is the difference between the two processes - building understanding based on words and building understanding based on prior knowledge?*

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4. Ravi said, 'I am going to see a dentist.' On hearing this statement, what questions come to your mind?

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**4.2.2 WHAT IS SPEAKING?**

Speaking does not mean mere pronunciation of sounds, words and sentences. Jean Aitchison in her book 'The Articulate Mammal' has talked elaborately about the linguistic understanding of human beings. According to her, while speaking we are simultaneously involved in many processes. Before speaking we plan in our minds, as to what we should speak such that the listener understands what we are saying. We also make up our mind about 'what' and 'how' to speak depending upon who we are speaking to. For example even if we are communicating the same thing to our friend and our grandfather, there will be a difference in the manner we speak and our choice of words.

However, in both the situations we first plan for what we have to say. The process of thinking of what we have to say first and then what goes next on while we are speaking. Let's understand this with an example:

- 'I will return home late today'
- 'Mother will get annoyed'
- 'I will have to stay out of home.'

The structure of all the three sentences given above is simple. If we have to speak these sentences in the following order, they are easy to understand as well as speak. Now when if we make these sentences dependent on each other, will they be as easy as before?

'If I return home late today, then mother will get annoyed and I will either have to stay out of home or go to some friend's house.'

In the above sentence 'then' is dependent on 'if', similarly, 'either' is related to 'or'. Clearly, even before speaking, the whole sentence has been formed in our mind along with its sound and its characteristics. All this happens in a planned manner. (Based on Jean Aitchison's book 'The Articulate Mammal')

It is evident from this example that during a conversation we have to keep planning while talking, it is a must. This process happens so fast that we don't realize its existence while talking. This is more relevant in the context of our mother tongue. While learning second language, these processes can be observed very closely.



While speaking, it is very important to select the right words along with their grammatical structure, which expresses our thoughts and feelings. In Hindi the sentence structure is Subject + Object + Verb and even before speaking, during the phase of planning, this structure is correctly formed in our minds and there is no confusion in this.

Voice modulation, pauses and even rhythm play an important role in conveying while speaking. We shall try understanding the significance of a pause, with an example-

*‘Pakdo mat jaane do’*

The meaning of this sentence changes depending upon where we pause while speaking it. If we momentarily pause after “pakdo” then we are being instructed to catch someone and not let him go but if the same pause is given after “pakdo mat” then the opposite meaning is being implied. Such understandings are an integral part of language learning and develop with practice.

Similarly, while speaking if we emphasize or pronounce a word with a different rhythm then it also impacts the meaning of the sentence.

*‘Yeh school hai’*

The above statement can be question, can be expressing surprise, can be expressing sarcasm or can simply be stating a fact depending on the its rhythm. At the same time the usage of non-verbal signals like gestures and expressions influence meaning while speaking,

**Check Your Progress-3**

1. *What is the sentence structure of Hindi language?*

*(a) Subject - Verb - Object*

*(b) Subject – Object – Verb*

*(c) Verb – Object - Subject*

*(d) Can't Say*

2. *Write down 10 sentences spoken by children in the age group of 3-4 years. From the perspective of rules of language, analyze and mention all that the child knows.*

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3. *Make a list of 5 sentences spoken by a non-English language speaker. Analyze the sentences and state the areas where she is facing difficulty?*

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### **4.3 NEED OF DIALOGUE IN THE CLASSROOM**

Speaking and listening are the first steps for learning a language. It is also clearly evident that both speaking and listening processes occur simultaneously during a dialogue.

It is often seen in language classrooms, teachers lecture and students quietly listen or teachers ask students questions and students voices are restricted to only answering these questions. These cannot be classified as dialogues, as dialogues occur when students are able to express their ideas and thoughts without any pressure from the teacher. Teachers think that class discipline is disturbed and in turn learning gets hampered due to such dialogues. It is because of this attitude that teachers are unable to comprehend the importance of dialogue in children's learning.

At the primary level, children are easily able to converse in their home language as well as understand it well. It is because till now they have been using it and as soon as they join school, they encounter a new language. The problem occurs when children are forced to learn and use the school's language. In fact, there is a need to accommodate both the languages in the classroom and the only way to reduce the gap between these languages is to provide them with more opportunity for dialogue. In these early opportunities a child's language should also be adopted so that she is able to respect her surroundings and able to feel confident about herself. This encouragement proves helpful to the child in acquiring the new language and also in increasing her enthusiasm.

Children never engage in aimless dialogue. This can be understood by reading the natural dialogue between these two children.



**CARTOON: (Please make the following changes in the adjoining picture)**

Girl – Look this lady is wearing a ring today!



Boy – You hadn't seen it before?

Girl – No.... Yes, yes I had seen it before.



Boy – Oh but this is a different ring!

Girl – The lady has bought a new ring. It is smaller than the previous one.



Boy – No this one is thinner?

Here children are exposed to several learning opportunities while they are engaged in a dialogue. Come, let's analyze these – By listening to the boy's statement, the girl got a chance to revisit her statement that the lady had worn a ring even earlier. Also, children were able to differentiate between *new-old* and *small-thin*.

In order to be conscious of the benefits of dialogue, it is necessary that we get used to listening to our children but adults mostly donot listen to their children. In any random dialogue, carefree children are found effortlessly reviewing, comparing and even imagining, passing predictions or reinforcing their statements with logic. We will have to recognize the possibility of learning through dialogue, for children.

**Check Your Progress-4**

1. Which two processes run simultaneously during a dialogue?
 

(a) listening and seeing	(b) reading and listening
(c) listening and speaking	(d) listening and laughing

2. What do teachers think about children's dialogue in the class?

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3. *What role is expected from a teacher in the classroom, so that the children get ample opportunities for dialogue?*

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4. *Observe the dialogue of any 3-6 year old child in your neighbourhood and write down your experience. Now analyze, which of the above stated actions is present in their dialogue?*

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### **4.4 HOW CAN WE PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LISTENING AND SPEAKING IN THE CLASSROOM?**

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Schools had opened after the summer holidays. Due to rains there were puddles full of rain water everywhere. A teacher was teaching in her class. Two children who were seated at the back were busy talking to each other. The teacher suddenly noticed them and asked them affectionately, ‘What is the matter, tell me? What are you two talking about? And if there is something interesting then do tell your classmates as well.’

The two children got nervous for a while and kept mum. The teacher then said, ‘Don’t be afraid. What was it that you were talking about?’

One of the children gathered some courage and said, ‘While we were coming from our home we heard frogs making loud sounds.’

The teacher said in an encouraging voice, ‘Oh! What happened next?’

Children- Frogs were jumping on the boundary of the puddle. The frogs were large.

Teacher- Then what happened?

Children- Then... Then when we went near them, they jumped into the puddle.



Both the children gained confidence. They were convinced that they would not be scolded for what they were sharing.

One of the children asked the teacher, ‘Where do frogs go after the rain?’

The teacher, leaving aside what she had been teaching, took up the topic– ‘Has everyone seen a frog?’ There was nobody in that class who had not seen a frog, ever. In response to the teacher’s question, the whole class echoed , ‘Yes’.

Each and every child started getting impatient to say something about frogs. One child said, ‘Frogs produce turr-turr sound in rains.’

Another child said, ‘When my backyard was being dug, frogs came out from it.’

One child shared that she had seen a frog eating insects. Someone was saying that frogs can jump from the coping of the step-well.

The atmosphere of the class turned “*frogous*”! Some children were making frog sounds [turr turr] while some were jumping like frogs.

The teacher was carefully listening to the children’s conversations and watching their activities. Also, the teacher was intermittently trying to maintain discipline in the classroom.

The teacher told the children, ‘Look, now carefully observe the frogs around you and ponder on where they go after the rains.’

Finally the teacher asked children to write 5 sentences on frogs.

In the conversation about frogs, the teacher was easily able to relate with the habitat, food habits, colour, size and nature of the frogs, with her teaching. If children are given such opportunities of conversation by the teachers, then slowly and steadily they will become capable of expressing their feelings and thoughts related to their experience. They will also be able to have a better understanding of the knowledge contained in various subjects. The teachers do not have to look out for such opportunities; but they can find them in the school environment or around it in places like – garden, farm, sewer, small culvert, flower, butterflies, road, soil, gate, nest, etc. By closely observing such things the children will be able to converse about them.

Here, the teacher gave the children abundant opportunities to speak as well as, encouraged them to speak. If the teacher had not encouraged the children, such interesting conversation would not have taken place in the classroom. In this manner, connecting children’s lives and experiences with the class, makes learning spontaneous and natural.



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**Check Your Progress-5**

1. *What is the advantage of giving children opportunities for dialogue?*
  - (a) *will become capable of expressing their experiences and thoughts*
  - (b) *will learn words*
  - (c) *will learn rhyming words*
  - (d) *will learn to read*
  
2. *Why is it necessary for a teacher to provide the child with opportunities to speak?*

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3. *How will you become a medium of learning-teaching dialogue to the children in the classroom?*

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4. *According to you, what should be the atmosphere in the classroom during teaching?*

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**4.4.1 LISTENING AND SINGING POEMS/4.4.1  
CHILDREN’S SONG/ POEM**

*Amma’s rotis*  
*Round and small*  
*Puffed up like a ping-pong ball.*  
*Amma’s rotis on a plate*  
*I sat down and finished eight*  
*I am a little tea pot*





*Short and stout  
Here is my handle  
Here is my spout  
When i get all steamed up  
Hear me shout  
Pick me up and pour me out  
One, two buckle my shoes  
Three, four shut the door  
Five, six pick up sticks  
Seven, eight lay them staight  
Nine, ten a big fat hen*

We often find children in lanes and neighborhood, singing nursery- rhymes by themselves or with their friends. While singing they do not fear being scolded, punished or ridiculed. Each and every child is fascinated by the rhythm and the words of the rhyme/poem.

Many times they use the words of the rhymes by extending their meaning and coming up with a nonsensical usage; they enjoy doing it. Playing with words can serve a wonderful role in flowering the creativity and energy of children. This poem presents an example of this-

Five little monkeys  
Jumping on the bed  
One fell down and  
Bumped his head  
Mama called doctor  
Doctor said  
No more monkey jumping on the bed

Usually while singing such songs, children keep adding and removing words but the rhythm of the poem is not broken. For example, the above poem is sung by a 4 year old like this-

*Three little babies  
Jumping on the bed  
All fell down  
And bumped their head*



*Mama came in  
And all of them said  
No more babies jumping on the bed*

Poem is a potential medium to express ourselves and to relate it to our lives. By regularly listening to poems and songs, children comprehend the basic structures of language. For instance- children are able to comprehend the meaning of new words, do rhyming by playing with the rhythm of the poem. At the same time the poem connects the children with their experiences. If the same poem is read by two different children, then both of them will construct the understanding of the poem by relating it to their own experiences.

It is left to the educators to make use of the poems in the classroom, such that the children develop creativity and are able to express their feelings and experiences through poems and songs.

### Check Your Progress-6

1. What do children comprehend by regularly listening to poems and rhymes?  
(a) word (b) sound  
(c) rhythm (d) basic structure of language
2. Make students of class 3 do the poem "Walking through the jungle". Ask them to extend the poem further by creating more lines. Discuss the lines added by children, as to why did they write these lines?

*Walking through the jungle*

*What did I see?*

*A big lion*

*Roaring at me*

*Walking through the jungle*

*What did I see?*

*A long snake*

*hissing at me*

*Walking through the jungle*

*What did I see?*

*A little baby monkey*

*Roaring at me*



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3. *What all opportunities of learning language are provided to the children by this poem?*

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### 4.4.2 DISCUSS THROUGH PICTURES

Picture is one such medium through which we can find ample possibilities for dialogue and discussion with children from standard 1 till standard 8. In primary standards children are very fond of pictures; they enjoy observing and drawing pictures. In any book, it is the pictures that first attract the attention of the children. It is easy to spontaneously talk to them about pictures. Children very closely observe pictures and can come up with numerous things to talk about them, which is beyond our imagination.

When we discussed the picture with the children of standard 3, we found that along with naming the objects evident in the picture they were also able to relate their observation with their experience and come up with logical statements. However all of them had their own perspectives. Some such examples are as follows:

- (i) The man is taking the cow/ A man is tying the ox/ A boy is entering the hut.
- (ii) One girl was climbing the tree, a boy stopped her as the tree was too big and she might get hurt./ Girl is swinging on the tree. / Trees are shaking. / Many trees are growing on the mountain.
- (iii) Sun is rising in the morning, birds are flying in the morning/ Sun is coming out/ It is evening/ Sun is setting
- (iv) Wife is returning home/ The women is carrying water.
- (v) Two heron are flying

The above sentences hint at the fact that children can do varied conversations over a picture. The conversation over pictures has the potential to promote creativity and analysis capability in children. Irrespective of whether those pictures are printed in newspapers, advertisement, ticket or at the back of a calendar. These pictures can be used in different ways for initiating conversation even in upper primary standard.

Sitting amongst children and letting them see a picture at their own pace; giving them the freedom to express their thoughts is very useful in developing uninhibited



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expression in them. The objects in the picture which had not yet caught the attention of the children can be brought to their notice by the teacher, through questions. In this way the ability of critical observation can be developed in children. Questions asked during the dialogue on pictures, give children an opportunity to sharpen their skills. The questions should be such that they help children in finding objects, in developing logic, imagination, prediction and in association of objects and incidents with their experience. For instance these questions based on the above picture demonstrate how to further the dialogue by asking questions -

What all is kept under the tree? (Explore)

Why is the girl standing beside the well, crying? (Use logic)

What are the women, standing by the village well, be talking about? (Imagine)

What will the women do once they reach home? (Predict)

Have you ever been to a village, if yes then what all did you see there? (Establish relation)

**Check Your Progress-7**

1. Showing the picture to the children and asking them to tell what all is kept under the tree? What opportunity does this present?

(a) to reason

(b) to explore

(c) to imagine

(d) to establish relation



2. With respect to this picture, what all can be discussed with children? Form questions; practice them with children of standard 3 and write down your experiences.

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### 4.4.3 STORY TELLING/ LISTENING

Listening and telling stories helps children in learning language in primary classes. Listening to stories is of interest to children and also enhances their creativity. Often it is seen that children mould the stories they have heard as per their wishes, while telling it to their friends. Through this children not only learn meaning of the words but also develop an understanding of various incidents and this facilitates in enhancing their imagination. Another way in which stories are beneficial is that it enhances the ability of children to estimate. For example, whenever children are listening to a story, they are curious to know about what happens next? They guess as per their understanding and if the story progresses as per their guess, they grow more confident and with time their estimates become more accurate. Most notably, these stories help the children to prepare for their future life. For example, the rabbit- lion story prepares them mentally to face the difficulties life brings. In the story telling we keep incorporating our life experiences in them. Sometimes when the story teller finds something very important then she exaggerates that part of the story. While doing this, the main focus is on shaping the life's incidents, characters, etc. and also in attracting the attention of the listener. Moreover the story teller's manner of telling the story impacts the interest generated in the story. And whenever new words are used in a story, the children are able to guess the meaning of the word by observing the expressions of the story teller. This facilitates in enhancing their vocabulary, listening- understanding and estimation.

Discussing about a story after listening to it, is a little difficult task but if the teacher is prepared with its objective then it can become a useful medium. Most of the teachers feel that after telling the story, it is their right to ask the children, about the lesson they have learnt from it. Whereas in order to initiate a meaningful dialogue with the children, raising this question is not at all correct.

Telling stories to children is as important as listening to stories from them. This helps the children in developing their ability to express themselves. Instead of asking the children to repeat the story told by the teacher, it is more beneficial to ask them to tell any story that they like. While responding to the personality and the character of the story, the child includes her experiences in it. Every child in the classroom should be given the freedom that she can talk anything regarding the story, can even exaggerate it through her imagination.



**Check Your Progress-8**

1. *Along with telling stories to children, what else is necessary?*
  - (a) *make them read the story*
  - (b) *make them memorize the story*
  - (c) *make them recite the story*
  - (d) *listen to their story*
  
2. *While talking to children in standard I-II, ask them which stories they like listening to? Keep writing these names on the blackboard. Then while making use of these names, ask children to form stories.*

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3. *While story formation, each child should contribute one sentence and you keep writing these sentences on the blackboard. Share your experience based on the following pointers-*
  - (i) *what were the words on which the story was based?*
  - (ii) *what was the story that was made by the children?*
  - (iii) *what has been your role during the activity?*
  - (iv) *what difficulties did you face during the activity?*

**4.4.4 LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DRAMA / THEATRE /PLAY**

Drama is not new for children. We often see children imitating cartoon or film characters or playing games like mother-father, doll’s marriage, school-school, etc. In this manner, during games play children do drama like; imitating someone, exaggerating something and making excuses. Every child has dramatic skills but children do not get any opportunity to utilize them in their classroom. The reason for this is that activities like drama- acting are performed only during annual functions or when some chief guest visits the school. Even in such situations, dialogues are written by teachers and there is always a risk factor during the performance.

Making use of acting as a day to day activity in a classroom is very different from



this. In order to use drama as a linguistic activity, two characteristics need to be included- freedom and enjoyment. No special preparation is needed by the teacher or children for conducting drama in the classroom. The teacher only needs to encourage the children to share their experiences naturally. At the primary level: any incident, story or cartoon that children see in their environment can be taken up for acting. For example, any animal, its movement, its complexion, etc. At upper primary level, the teacher should motivate children so that they form small groups wherein they themselves decide the topic, write the dialogues and act it out. At the same time children should be encouraged to act out traditional games and folk tales as this will not only enhance their creativity but also connect them to their cultural environments.

#### **4.4.5 CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

In order to provide opportunities for listening and speaking to children in the classroom, some other activities can also be undertaken. Activities that give them an opportunity to ponder over and present their thoughts in their own words are really important. Extempore activities wherein children have to immediately present their views on a given topic often prove challenging and productive. To make it interesting we can take up some entertaining topics so that children enjoy speaking and listening about them. Like- “if I found Aladdin’s lamp”, “if I were a magician”, “if I were a clown”, etc.

The second activity is debate. In this children have to present their views on either for or against the topic and have to strongly refute their opponents’ views in such a manner that the speaker is able to influence and convince as much audience as possible. For example, “Industry: a boon or a bane”, “Fast food vs. Health”. Such activities can be conducted for children of all levels. Children get such opportunities through these activities that enable them to establish a relation between their thoughts and their speech, organize them in a systematic order while incorporating logic in their experience; they become an effective speaker and an efficient listener.

In order to accomplish this, the teacher from the very beginning has to inculcate the habit of patient listening and respecting other’s views, in her children.

#### **Check Your Progress-9**

1. *Children involved in a child’s play; imitate, exaggerate and make excuses. Which skills of children are evident from this-?*
  - (a) *skill of speaking*
  - (b) *skill of dialogue*



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(c) memorizing skill

(d) dramatics skill

- Pick an agreeable topic and conduct an extempore activity in 7<sup>th</sup> standard. Write your experiences.

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### 4.5 FLUENCY VS. ACCURACY

Accuracy and fluency are the two elements involved in language proficiency. What is the role of these elements in the learning of language by a child and as a teacher, what needs to be focused more during teaching language to children? It is important to think on these issues. The capability through which the learner correctly pronounces a sentence, while using the correct grammar and terminology is called accuracy. The level of accuracy of a child at primary level is different from that of an adult. As we have read in unit 3: at each and every level, a child learns language by committing mistakes. A child’s errors help her in learning and simultaneously even while committing error she is following the rules of language. For instance a 3 year old child speaks in order to express herself:

*Mummy car chahiye hai.*

*Paani chahiye hai.*

The child knows that every sentence ends with the word “hai” and therefore she uses “hai” after “chahiye”. As per language rules, “chahiye” is an auxiliary verb. For instance- “humein rasgulla khaana chahiye”, in this sentence “chahiye” is an auxiliary verb while in the above sentences it is a main verb. Another auxiliary verb “tha” is used along with “chahiye”, only in past tense. For example: “Mujhe wahan jaana chahiye tha”. Although the child is unaware of this rule but she uses it.

In reference to the learning proficiency, fluency means the ability through which a child is spontaneously able to express herself by speaking, reading and writing. In this, emphasis is laid on meaning and context rather than on grammatical errors.

Today a language teacher faces a huge dilemma, as to which out of the two should she seriously pursue? Both the perspectives are present in front of us.





Traditional teachers give greater importance to accuracy, in language learning. They force the children to read and write in correct grammatical terms. For this, they test the children through various periodic assessments. In most of the classes children are hardly given an opportunity to improve by recognizing their own errors. Examination centered approach is influenced by this *accuracy based perspective*.

Another group of teachers believe that language is the medium for expression of feelings and experiences. They give more importance to fluency. Instead of grammar, they lay focus on understanding the meaning and reference, along with this, they emphasize that the children speaking fluently should be able to express themselves in such a way that the listener understands it correctly. These teachers believe; that since initiation, the more the child will make use of language, the more her level of fluency will rise.

In fact after having a look at both the perspectives, it seems that both stand correct in their own place. In order to learn language from an overall perspective, children have to be skilled in both. Reaching class 10, children start using language with fluency. It is then that we should focus on accuracy because timely and appropriate help plays a very important role in a child’s language development.

**Check Your Progress-10**

1. *“I need a car”, what is “need” in this sentence -*

- (a) auxiliary verb*
- (b) adjective*
- (c) noun*
- (d) main verb*

2. *Explain “accuracy” and “fluency” in your own words.*

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3. *In your opinion out of accuracy and fluency, which one is more meaningful in learning language?*

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## 4.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we discussed that listening and speaking do not mean the mechanical activity of hearing and speaking but it also involves an equally important conceptual process. We also realized that children spontaneously become proficient in their mother tongue but in order to achieve a similar level of proficiency in their school's language, special efforts are required. Most significant amongst them is to provide children with opportunities to speak in the classroom, which is a unique means of learning and which leaves a deep impact on children's social behavior and personality. It was also discussed that a teacher has a significant role in making opportunities available to the children and that she can encourage the children towards uninhibited expression. During this, another important aspect emerged that fluency has a priority over accuracy in learning language by children.

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## 4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## 4.8 UNIT-END EXERCISES

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1. Which capacities in children can be developed with the help of stories?
2. The moment children speak in the classroom, they are checked. Do you find this attitude correct? Present your view.
3. Write a story based on which plenty of discussion can happen in a classroom and through which a child's listening and speaking capacity can be developed?
4. Which is your favourite way to encourage children to discuss and why? Illustrate through an example.
5. What is really involved in listening?



6. There are some children who do not participate in the discussions in classroom. What strategy will you devise to include such children in the classroom discussion? Elaborate on any two.
7. Find a poem of 4 lines for standard 3 children, which they can build upon. Do this exercise in the classroom.
8. Why is there a difference in listening and understanding between home language and schools' language?
9. While telling a story in the classroom, a child falters or uses incorrect pronunciation. How will you plan for her improvement?
10. In the sequence of teaching language, at which level should accuracy be a priority and at which level should fluency be a priority and why?

### ACTIVITY

- Observe children who are engaged in their conversation. Try to let them talk as naturally as possible. Notice what all they talk. How will you use their conversation in the classroom?
- Make children from standard 3.5 to present a story in the form of a play. For this, facilitate the children in writing dialogues and then ask them to enact it. Describe your experience.



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## UNIT 5 READING

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### STRUCTURE

5.0 *Introduction*

5.1 *Learning Objectives*

5.2 *What does reading mean?*

5.3. *Why is it important to be able to read?/ The importance of being able to read*

5.4 *The methods or techniques of teaching how to read*

5.4.1 *The current methods of teaching how to read and the shortcomings.*

5.4.2 *Enablers for learning to read.*

5.4.3. *What can we do to teach reading?*

5.4.4 *Some activities*

5.5 *Inter-relationship of reading and writing*

5.6 *Let Us Sum Up*

5.7 *Suggested Readings and References*

5.8 *Unit-End Exercises*

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### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit, we will try to understand what reading means. We will try to understand what a person who knows how to read does in the process of reading a text and examine what all is included in reading? We will also think about the need of learning to read and discuss the relationship between reading and writing. Since, one major objective of primary school is to help children learn to read, it is important that we increase the possibilities of children learning to read.

In this unit, we will also talk about how the process of learning to read can be made more interesting and the role of interesting texts in this enterprise. We will discuss questions like whether there can be a set of pre-decided stages or steps for learning to read. Does a child learn to read in a linear way or in a holistic manner?



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## 5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit:

- You should be able to understand the wider meaning of reading.
- Understand the reasons for children not being able to read.
- Analyze methods used to teach ‘how to read’.
- Understand that language can be learnt in its totality and not in bits and pieces.
- Identify the possible processes for reading.
- Use the strategies for teaching how to read in classroom.
- Articulate the importance of using reading materials and context other than the textbooks for teaching how to read.
- Clarify inter-relationship between reading and writing.

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## 5.2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO READ?

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The biggest and the most complex challenge of a primary school teacher faces, is to help her/his student learn to read. This is difficult because reading is not an easy skill/ability to acquire. It is very different from the oral language which a child acquires so effortlessly in natural settings before she/he comes to school. There are many sub-skills and cognitive abilities interwoven in it. The important question is: What do we understand by reading? Generally teachers think that it is enough if the child is able to read aloud textbooks. They do not really worry about whether the child has been able to understand what has been written in the textbooks or outside them.

Reading is a creative enterprise because the reader does not read aloud the written text as it is but also makes meaning of the text based on her experiences. In reading it is important to grasp the meaning of the text. When we read, our mind and eyes do not go into the details of the letters used, punctuations or even each word. What this means is that we do not have to look at each component of the sentence while reading. If we had to do that, keeping in mind all these small details about letters, punctuations, words, etc. it would become burdensome and boring and we might not be able to make any sense out of what we read. And people would not be able to read at the pace that they do. This would have made reading, even small news items, leave aside complex and long texts, very difficult. A fluent reader, does not look at the shape of any specific letter, word or even a



sentence. (S)he actually reads in chunks, his/her eyes constantly moving back and forth and up and down. His/Her eyes look at a part of the written text and (s)he grasps the rest of it based on his/her previous experience and anticipation. This anticipation and prior knowledge of what would be there is based on the experience of the reader. The small piece that (s)he sees tells him/her what could be possibly written and as (s)he glances at another small piece, (s)he is able to know without going into all details. In the occasional case that it does not connect with what comes ahead, you go back and check again. Therefore, reading includes the following:

Reading is to absorb meaning of the written texts.

- Reading is to be able to form or build concepts, link ideas and keep them in mind.
- Be able to understand the text, follow its logic and its premises.
- Reading does not mean recognition of alphabets or being able to speak aloud words and sentences but is much more. For example, it means understanding what is written and using that to build one's own perspective and understanding.
- Reading does not mean pronouncing pieces of the word but is to be able to have a dialogue with the texts, assimilate that into experiences and conceptual structure.
- Reading is a holistic process. It includes shapes of letters, the sounds linked with them, sentence structures, word and sentence meaning and the ability to anticipate and predict.
- The important thing in reading is to absorb meaning from the written information or symbols.

Therefore, it is clear that reading is a set of abilities that help us link the written or printed linguistic material with its meaning. In the ability to read the point that attracts the maximum emphasis is the definition of meaning. The meaning of reading is to read with understanding.

### Check Your Progress-1

1. Tick the most important thing about reading:

- (a) Absorbing the meaning of the written text.
- (b) Reading each word of the text.



(c) *Read aloud in flow.*

(d) *Focus on punctuation.*

2. *What are the different aspects included in reading?*

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3. *Reading is a creative enterprise. How?*

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### 5.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ABLE TO READ/ WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE ABLE TO READ

We know that in principle it is possible to construct knowledge without books. When there was no print or script, societies exchanged knowledge, culture and traditions without reading/writing books. Even today many societies share all this orally. However, the possibilities of exchange and development of knowledge have increased substantially due to development of script and print. In today's world books occupy extremely important position and it has become essential to be able to read and write. Being able to read with understanding, builds our personality and gives us self-confidence. The ability to read not only brings us close to living in reality around us but we can also reach places that are far away from us. Literature is one such example. According to Nehru, reading involves understanding different aspects and changing colours of life; our personal experiences are limited and they are extended by reading books.

To summarise, the ability to read helps us extend our knowledge. It makes the reader think wider, be logical and liberal in ideas. It also exposes the person to a wider social, cultural and liberal context.

### 5.4 THE METHODS AND WAYS OF TEACHING HOW TO READ

Generally teaching children how to read is a very difficult task for teachers. This



is because there is no one simple and infallible method for it. Each method suggested has its limitations. Nobody but a teacher can decide which method would be appropriate in her situation. In spite of this difficulty, once acquired, reading is an extremely energising enterprise and a large part of life of the child depends on it. If we are able to make the child interested in books and reading, then there is no limit to what she can read and grow to.

The question really is: How do we make children learn to read? If we look around and analyse what exists, we see failure. What is the reason for this? Millions indeed billions of children make an attempt to learn to read every year but a lot of them are not able to read comfortably. Many children keep passing their exams but do not find reading interesting. The reasons for these failures in some way actually reside in inappropriate teaching.

No teacher needs to be told what the ability to read with interest can do for the child. It is, however, possible that the teachers may not be able to spell out in any detail what the ability of reading consists of and how it can be developed? But most teachers have an intuitive understanding what reading is all about. It is important to recognise that till a child becomes capable of comprehending material that is being read and link it to her/his earlier experience; we cannot say that (S)he has a fully developed ability to read. In this context, reading can be defined as the process of finding the meaning encoded in the printed or written material; it includes the ability to read between the lines.

If we accept the above definition for reading, the informal or formal primary school methods are not appropriate. For example, according to what we discussed, reading aloud letters, memorising letters of the alphabet, repeating the story without comprehension, reading aloud the text without comprehension are not good activities. In these we are not able to link the written material with any meaning. In many schools, even today 'a' is linked to 'apple' and 'c' is linked to 'cat'. This results in the child reading an 'a' as 'apple' and 'c' as 'cat'. Similarly, if a story is read one word at a time, we cannot form any particular meaning for it and would not be able to establish any rapport with it i.e. we will not be able to relate to it. Even if the statement that such activities eventually result in children learning to make meaning are partially right that would only be possible if the child stays in school long enough to get sufficient opportunities to read with meaning. We have to think about children who being bored with repeating and copying letters or words and reading them aloud repeatedly, dropout or get disinterested beyond recovery. These tedious tasks may lead to only a few children learning to read. We must recognise that this method of teaching how to read is actually very boring and unproductive. Because of this many children leave the school even before they finish their early/ primary education.





Notes

**Check Your Progress-2**

1. *How we can develop the interest of the child in reading (tick one):*

- (a) *By using textbooks.*
- (b) *By memorising letters of the alphabet.*
- (c) *By using interesting processes of teaching to read.*
- (d) *By rote learning to memorise stories.*

2. *What would you include in a sound ability to read?*

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3. *Why do many children leave school even before primary education?*

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**5.4.1 THE POPULAR METHODS OF TEACHING READING AND THEIR SHORTCOMINGS**

The methods currently used in our schools appear divorced from the basic principles of reading. We give below some commonly used school methods that instead of helping the child, add to his/her difficulties in reading. We put a question mark before each such popularly followed rule of the thumb. We are not sure whether they really help children.

- **Knowing the rules of reading quickly**

This is a useless enterprise as there are really no rules for reading. At least none that can be simplified and defined for children. All fluent readers develop the knowledge necessary to read but they develop it from the effort to read rather than by being told. This process is akin to the process of the child acquiring oral language. The child is able to develop the rules for articulation and comprehension without being taught any formal rules. There is no evidence to suggest that teaching grammar helps in making children develop the ability to speak. There is also no evidence indicating that practicing pronunciation or other non-reading tasks help in developing reading ability.

Generally what are known as rules of reading are merely instructions that



## Notes

indicate the steps to begin reading. Learning to read is not about remembering rules, children will learn to read by the enterprise of reading itself.

- **For reading, the child has to remember rules of pronunciation and follow them**

One widely accepted view is that the ability to read comes from being able to link sound to its corresponding symbolic representation. We, however, know reading does not end or begin at being able to pronounce the text. We have to grasp the meaning even before we pronounce the word unless we know the word we cannot speak it. Converting letters to sound is not only unnecessary but also a waste of effort. If we look carefully it is obvious that a fluent reader does not get into changing letters to sounds. Such a process does not help in making meaning; it rather takes one away from it. In spite of this it is often argued that children will have to develop competence in pronunciation of the word, part by part, as per letters used otherwise they will not be able to recognise words they have not seen earlier.

- **Emphasis on teaching one letter or word at a time**

Another widespread belief is that some children find it difficult to learn the names of things, some of the letters and some words. It is suggested that the only way for these is repeated practice. This is an extreme and erroneous simplification of the learning process. Children in initial 5-6 years of their life, learn almost one thousand words everyday. Most of these words are names and are learnt generally in the first attempt only.

The process through which children learn to categorise groups or sets is quite instructive. They look at the situation where the name is being used and identify characteristics that can help them recognise it in future as well. They make hypothesis to understand a concept and repeatedly test and modify it. The errors that children make are windows to help us understand the way they progress including their hypothesis. For example, if a child calls all four legged animals as 'dog', we can then conclude that in their present conceptualisation 'dog' means a 4 legged animal. If they use this name for all 4 legged animals as well as for a table, we can assume that they do not have the concept of 'living'. If they only call their own dog, a dog, then it implies that they are not generalising adequately.

Children will only be able to make such hypothesis when they are able to compare the members of the group with non-members. It is important that they get to know non-dog four legged animals. Children can improve their hypotheses only by examining them or by considering the views of others.



This situation also arises in learning names of letters and words. Showing them 'a' separately and repeating that this is 'a' will not help. They will still continue to call 'b' as 'd' or 'd' as 'b' unless they are presented together. Instead of showing them these letters repeatedly we should allow them to find out in what way 'b' and 'd' are different. This requires that they should be able to first see them together and need to differentiate between them. It is only then they will be able to see how they are different.

- **Children must be discouraged from anticipating and guessing, always reading accurately**

A fluent reader makes maximum use of very little visible information. It is easier to read for meaning than to read each word. Reading fast is easier than reading slowly. Whatever we have said till now implies that reading carefully is not fluent reading and reading without a purpose is not reading at all. Goodman has correctly defined reading as "a game of psycho-linguistic speculation". It is necessary to anticipate meaning for being able to read. This is not hunting in the dark but predicting based on available data. Data based speculation implies better use of the available information. In other words, we must continue to anticipate while reading and ensure that the uncertainty in our anticipation becomes less and less and we are able to use less and less visual information to understand meaning.

When we read an unfamiliar, or a complex text, a complicated novel, a technical article or something in a foreign language, even though it may feel necessary, we know that it is difficult to move ahead sentence by sentence, continually referring to the dictionary. We may feel that we should slow down and read slowly, but actually the best strategy in this situation is to accelerate and keep on reading.

Whatever we have said so far suggests the common principle that continuing to read itself suggests the meaning. In a text, the best way to understand an unknown word is to infer meaning from the remaining text. The best way to find the meaning of a difficult text is to keep on reading it.

- **Emphasis should be on reading word by word**

The fact that recognition or learning of separate words is one of the most difficult way to learn is another reason for not emphasising word recognition. A fluent reader uses many other hints for this. When a letter comes in a word or when a word comes in a meaningful sentence, it is easier to recognise it. Recognising words is not the most important component of reading. To be able to identify a word detached from other words requires many more visible hints in comparison to a word that is placed in a sentence. Since our



ability to absorb visible symbols and keep them in memory is limited, therefore a process requiring more visible information makes reading difficult. The most important aspects of learning to read is to recognise that the minimum possible visible information should be utilised for grasping what is written.

Fluent readers do not read words, they read the content. Reading for meaning is easier than reading words. Children certainly know this because reading each word puts a great stress on their ability to absorb information.

- **Reading correctly and with accuracy is imperative**

No one can learn without errors. If we do not accept the possibility of error we cannot even learn to read names of animals, plants, trees or read letters, words etc. Actually this is the biggest barrier in learning to read as children may not make an effort to read due to the fear of making mistakes. The errors made by children during reading are a natural and essential part of the process of learning to read.

In a learning task if the child knows before (S)he tries it, that (S)he would be right, (S)he does not gain anything in this enterprise. On the other hand, if (S)he takes a leap and says what the name of the object or the meaning of a word may be and is aware that it could also be wrong, (s)he learns something from the enterprise. It is by checking his/her hypothesis that (S)he learns to add to his/her hypothesis. If (S)he is right, (S)he will consolidate his/her hypothesis and if wrong, (S)he will get the information needed to change it.

- **Point out mistakes as soon as they occur**

It is easy for the teacher to point out the mistakes made by the child in reading a particular word. This, however, does not help the child. She is not reading for word recognition, she is reading for meaning. If the child is practicing word recognition and wants to know whether she has correctly identified the word, an immediate comment can be useful. But if the child is reading to understand meaning, immediate comments can in fact be harmful. This shows that in the process of reading we are checking on what we have read all the time. We will examine our own errors in comprehension and word recognition provided we are reading for meaning.

- **Beware of encouraging children to read on their own**

Children often acquire many aspects of reading that are not taught by anyone else. Many of these are not even known to their parents and sometimes not



even to teachers. For example, nobody tells the child that in *but* ‘u’ stands for ‘a’ (अ) while in *put* ‘u’ stands for ‘u’ (उ). The children also realise that in many places the letter at the end or in the middle will be spoken or not spoken depending upon sounds around it. In Hindi for example, the child recognises the rule that in ‘मर’ ‘म’ represents a full sound with a vowel.. While in ‘रम’ it is only half sound without a vowel. In both ‘kram’ (क्रम) and in ‘trak’ (ट्रक) the sound ‘r’ is complete, yet it is represented differently. You can think of many other such rules of sounds symbol association that the child internalises on her own. If we appreciate that the child is capable of identifying such complex rules on her own, our method of teaching her would completely change. Instead of purity, accuracy and correcting errors, we would then concentrate on how to provide more and more interesting and challenging material to children.

**Check Your Progress-3**

1. *Natural and essential stage of learning to read is (TICK ONE):*

- (a) *Errors made during reading.*
- (b) *Making no mistakes.*
- (c) *Rote learning letters.*
- (d) *Rote learning words.*

2. *While a child is learning to read, stopping and/or correcting the mistake immediately during reading is not considered useful. Why?*

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3. *Learning to read is not an enterprise of rule memorisation. Why?*

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4. *What are the ways of teaching to read?*

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5. *What are the shortcomings of the present methods of teaching reading? Explain with examples.*

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6. *What is the proof of the statement that “many aspects of reading are learnt on their own by children”?*

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### 5.4.2 ENABLERS FOR LEARNING TO READ

#### Many occasions to read

While teaching children how to read some things have to be kept in mind. The first is that the material used must be meaningful and of the level of the child. The second is that the material should be in a language that the child is familiar with. The third is that the teacher should give children maximum opportunity to read and understand a variety of materials. The teacher should have a meaningful dialogue with the children, listen to them carefully and with affection allow them to have and listen to other conversations. There is no point in breaking up written material into letters, words, intonations etc. Breaking in small pieces does not aid learning. Reading is not learnt in pieces or in a pre-defined order. Reading can be only learnt by reading and children will learn to read only when the enterprise of reading is enjoyable for them.

#### Reading must be purposeful and challenging

The reading material must be useful, meaningful and challenging for the reader. Whenever we read something, we read it for some purpose. These could be, for example, reading for fun, reading due to curiosity, reading to understand the sequence of events in a story, to know what happens at the end of story, to learn about, what is happening around and find whether such materials are even being written or not. If they are given challenges of this kind, challenges that give them opportunity to learn more, talk about what they have learnt and share their experiences, they will learn to read faster. If reaching the meaning of a text to



find something that they want to know is a challenge, they will feel inspired to make an effort. When we provide an environment laden with written texts in a class, actually we construct an exciting classes. An environment enriched by meaningful and challenging written material inspires the child to learn to read.

### **Contextual reading material**

Children learn language and learn to read in context. Stories and poems also form interesting contexts. While relating a story you should stop in between and let children complete what would follow. Many important concepts are natural parts of the stories (for example- big, small, near-far, fat-thin etc.). Children acquire or consolidate them easily through a story. The context of the story introduces these and when enacted their meaning gets clearer. Besides, the child gets an opportunity to place herself in different characters and in imaginary situations. Initially children mimic and copy only the gross visible features of the characters. For example, their way of walking, making sounds etc. These may include the jumping as the rabbit, kicking as the horse, wake up call as a cock etc. It is these contexts that help children to learn to read.

### **Using familiar sentence structures**

While reading children will anticipate what lies ahead on the basis of the language they know. The closer the reading material is to the language of the child, the easier would be learning how to read. Therefore, it is necessary that children relate to the material that they have read or listened to and they should be able to find ways of using it. For example, if the child has heard a story at home or outside and if (S)he gets an opportunity to read it (S)he will find it easier to read.

### **Reading corner**

It is important that there should be a corner in the class where selected children's literature is placed for children to read. These books can also be used to 'read aloud' stories to the children. Listening to a story that has been read is extremely helpful in learning to read. Whenever a familiar story is read aloud many times children gradually absorb the order of events, syntax and other aspects of the story. All this helps them to read with anticipation of what lies ahead. For children, to continue to be interested in the reading corner, good quality and new books must be added periodically.



Notes

### Check Your Progress-4

1. Which of these are enablers for learning to read? Give reasons for your choices:

- (a) Expensive books.
- (b) Context laden reading material.
- (c) Using familiar sentence structure (syntax).
- (d) Plenty of opportunities to read.

2. What is the importance of contextual reading material in learning to read?

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3. What is meant by reading corner in the class? How would you use such a corner?

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### 5.4.3 WHAT CAN WE DO TO TEACH READING?

We have just read about the techniques used to teach reading and their shortcomings. It leads to the question that, if commonly used popular methods are not appropriate, what else can be done to help children learn to read?

We give some techniques and activities below. People used to traditional methods may find these surprising and even impossible. However, were the commonly used techniques interesting and effective, we would not have to think about new activities or methods at all.

#### Start with books

It is better to begin to teach reading through books rather than flash cards, charts, wooden letters etc. In any case the objective is to ensure that children can read books. Charts and other materials can be occasionally used but cannot play as important a role as books. We, however, need to know the kind of books needed and how to use them. Books with small interesting stories can be useful. The





collection of stories can include simple and illustrated stories printed or neatly written by hand (the illustrations can even be made by children.). Apart from stories, poems, songs and play poems can also be included in the collection.

### **Reading aloud a book to children**

When we read aloud to children it should not be to a very large group. They should be preferably seated around you. The rest of the children of the class can be given some other interesting work. The children around you should be able to see the page of the book. While reading the book you should elaborate by adding things from your side. Some books are very well elaborated. You may want to shorten it for children and relate it in your own words. Reading the elaborate story with very long descriptions may not hold the attention of children. On the other hand, if there are only one or two lines on a page something can be added to it while working with books. It is necessary that children be shown the illustrations in the book and they are talked about in detail.

### **Reciting and signing poems**

The ability to anticipate is an important component of reading. Poems can play a significant role in its development. If children regularly hear poems read out to them, they have a greater chance of appreciating the structure of the language. It is easier to remember poems as children do not have to make a lot of effort to remember them. Listening to them a few times, enjoying them and repeating them ensure that they are remembered. Children need a variety of good poems. The teacher can select these poems herself keeping in mind that they should be natural. We have to avoid poems that merely preach moral lessons. What we can also do is to collate songs that children sing while running around, skipping ropes or playing games. The collection can also include folk songs. These can take the form of small booklets with each page having a neatly written poem along with illustrations. The teacher can prepare many such booklets and also use older children in this preparation. The poems in the book should be read the same way as any other book. Children should be seated around and the book in between. After reading a poem a couple of times it should be sung without the book and children should sing along. If the poem is of a good quality, the children will be able to remember it and whenever they read it they will be able to anticipate the words ahead easily. For examples, we are giving some poems here that can be used in the classroom. Please look for other such poems and use them with children in different ways. Consider, for example, the following poem for Class 4:

### The Quarrel

*I quarreled with my brother,  
 I don't know what about,  
 One thing led to another  
 And somehow we fell out.  
 The start of it was slight,  
 The end of it was strong,  
 He said he was right,  
 I knew he was wrong!  
 We hated one another.  
 The afternoon turned black.  
 Then suddenly my brother  
 Thumped me on the back,  
 And said, 'oh, come along!  
 We can't go on all night-  
 I was in the wrong.'  
 So he was in the right.*

—Eleanor Farjeon

The amount children would learn enjoying reading and writing such poems is far greater than what we can achieve by teaching 'a' for 'apple'. Or consider the following poem that may be used in the middle school:

*I went to the pictures tomorrow,  
 I took a front seat at the back;  
 I fell from the pit to the gallery,  
 And broke a front bone in my back.  
 A lady she gave me some chocolate,  
 I ate it and gave it her back  
 I phoned for a taxi and walked it,  
 And that's why I never came back.*

If children enjoy the poem, they can make similar poems in English and/ or in their own languages. They can also try to translate this poem into the languages represented in the classroom.



Notes

**Check your progress-6**

1. *It is better to start the enterprise of teaching to read with-*

- (a) *Flash cards* (b) *Charts*  
(c) *Wooden letters and such materials.* (d) *Books*

2. *In contrast to the traditional ways of teaching 'how to read' what are the other things that can be done to help children learn to read?*

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.....  
.....

3. *Why is it easier to teach reading using poems?*

.....  
.....  
.....

**5.4.4 SOME ACTIVITIES****Alphabet recognition**

We believe that children acquire the alphabet on their own in the process of engaging with interesting material. This is in the same way as they acquire the sounds of language while engaging with sounds in the world. Even so activities can help in this process. For example, activities of alphabet recognition using stories or poems can be useful. Children can be asked, after a poem has been sung many times, to circle where a certain letter occurs. Then they can be asked to list all the words where these letters (say b, d, m etc) occur. Then they can be asked to write more words containing any of these letters. The children can be then asked to identify the words containing say letters 'u' and 'v'. We can then write some new words on the blackboard and ask children to identify different letters in them. It may be important to remember that sometimes in the Roman alphabet the sound and the letter shape do not match particularly in the context of Indian pronunciation. Such patterns would need to be pointed out occasionally for children to acquire the rule. This kind of exercise can be done in the Hindi class as well, here we can ask them to circle Devnagari alphabet like 'ज', 'च' etc. Similarly they can be asked to circle 'ब', 'व' which children find difficult to differentiate.



**Do what you have read**

For those children who have learnt to read it is important to realise that there can be a relationship between reading and doing. In this activity, the teacher will stand near the board and instead of speaking would write small instructions on the board. Each child should have a serial number and the teacher can write the serial number of the child with the instruction. The instructions could be; ['get up', go out and bring a stone – No. 10'.] This instruction means that the child with serial number-10 has to get up, go out and bring a stone. The next instruction can be – ['No. 8 take the stone and keep it on your knee' .] Slowly, the instructions can become more complex and could include the child finding something specific in the posters on the wall or show the way to the hospital in a map or go and count the number of trees in the vicinity of the school etc.

**Word before – Word after**

For this activity there must be plenty of books available. Distribute the books among children so that each child gets a book that she can read easily. Tell children that they should open the book at any page and look at the bottom right hand corner. Is there a full stop at the end right at the bottom right corner of the page? If yes, open another page. Choose a page that does not have a full stop at the end. Tell them to read this page silently and stop when at the end of the page. When they reach there they must without turning the page tell the class what they anticipate to be the first word on the next page. When each of them has shared their anticipated word, ask them to turn over the page and check. You can encourage children by asking the class to clap if the guess was correct. After the sharing and checking of the anticipated word is over each child can now look at the start of another page and without turning back predict the last word of the previous page.

**Check Your Progress-6**

1. *Suggest two new activities for learning to read.*

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.....  
.....

2. *How do activities help in learning to read?*

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.....



## 5.5 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING AND WRITING

Reading and writing are generally considered to be different abilities. It is believed that reading involves imbibing the ability to absorb the meaning of a written text. Similarly, writing is a productive ability, to write whatever you want to express.

In elementary school programs these abilities are often considered to be sequential. We first teach children to read and then to write. The new emerging understanding is however, that reading and writing are not two separate processes but are so inter-linked that understanding of and ability to read also affects the ability to write. There are many elements that make these two processes complementary. Just like the need to keep using words, to create meanings. Similarly while reading the reader makes meaning as (S)he reads. The reader keeps changing and adjusting his/her initial formulation of the meaning. Similarly, while writing we repeatedly modify what we write. We construct the meaning both in reading and writing. For example, when a child sees his/her mother write under a specific date on the calendar “change gas cylinder”, the child is not merely watching a writing activity. Obviously, in this process a lot including reading is also involved.

In this example of just one activity many concepts and ideas of reading and writing are included. It is to be noted that this is an activity that happens in almost all houses (even in those where newspapers or periodicals are not received). Once the child understands what was done by her mother (S)he would use the calendar in some other manner. For example, to mark the visit of grand parents, (S)he can put a mark on 22<sup>nd</sup> October and make two faces. For this (S)he may need help of his/her elder siblings or his/her parents. Even before admission to the school, children see many processes that expose them to written language and to reading-writing.

### Check Your Progress-7

1. *Why are reading and writing generally considered to be two separate abilities?*

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2. What do you see as the common process between reading and writing?

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## 5.6 LET US SUM UP

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Reading is a creative enterprise. It does not mean merely voicing what is written but needs grasping the meaning of the written text. While reading we do not look at each component of the written material but take a holistic picture of what we see. Most of it is anticipated and guessed. Speculation/ guessing forms an important part of the ability to read. The present methods of teaching reading that include reading letter by letter, memorising rules, reading word by word, emphasising accuracy and correctness, repeatedly pointing out mistakes and errors, do not promote the ability to read but rather present barriers to it. It is necessary that children are provided reading opportunities that are interesting and linked to their context so that reading becomes a joyful process.

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## 5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Pandey, Lata (2008), *padhne ki dehlīj par*, New Delhi, NCERT.

NCERT, (2008) *padhne ki samajh*. New Delhi, NCERT.

Joshi, Susheel (1989), *bachhe padh kyon nahin paate*, *Strote*, Eklavya.

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## 5.8 UNIT-END EXERCISES

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1. What are the main points about reading that you can extract from this unit?
2. What does reading mean? When can we say that a child has learnt to read?
3. Do you think we should use stories for helping children learn to read? If so, explain with an example.
4. What efforts can be made to make reading joyful?
5. What materials apart from the textbook would you like to use to aid learning to read?

## Reading

6. Analyse the current methods used to teach reading.
7. Is it easier to learn language holistically or piece by piece? Justify your answer with examples.

## Assignment

1. Make a reading corner in your classrooms and encourage children to use it.
2. Make a collection of songs and poems generally sung by children. How will you use these to help children learn to read?



Notes



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## UNIT 6 WRITING

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### STRUCTURE

- 6.0 *Introduction*
- 6.1 *Learning Objectives*
- 6.2 *What does writing mean?*
- 6.3 *Beginning to write*
  - 6.3.1 *Fine motor skills*
  - 6.3.2 *Practicing letters, words and sentences*
- 6.4 *Elements of good handwriting*
  - 6.4.1 *Legible vs. good handwriting*
  - 6.4.2 *Helping children to develop a good handwriting*
  - 6.4.3 *Handwriting and personality*
  - 6.4.4 *Handwriting as an indicator of dyslexia and other disabilities*
- 6.5 *Characteristics of good writing*
  - 6.5.1 *Grammatically correct language*
  - 6.5.2 *Keeps the reader in mind, lucidity and brevity*
  - 6.5.3 *Simple vs. flowery language*
- 6.6 *Developing writing skills in lower classes*
- 6.7 *Higher forms of writing*
- 6.8 *Let Us Sum Up*
- 6.9 *Model answers to Check Your Progress*
- 6.10 *Suggested Readings and References*
- 6.11 *Unit-End Exercises*

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### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous units, we learnt about three language skills- listening, speaking and reading and their mutual dependence. The ability to write is the last one to develop in children and is also dependent on these three skills. While learning to write, the two functions of language- ‘communication’ and ‘expression’ are very important. In this unit, we will talk about the development of communicative





ability and the development of expression in children, and learning to write in the context of these two functions. Certain techniques will also be suggested for teaching writing effectively. We should like to point out that like all other skills, writing should also be seen in a holistic perspective; while writing, you are also reading what you write and you are also in a sense speaking and listening to yourself about what you write.

Teaching will be effective only if the experience is meaningful for children. This principle has implications for teaching of letters and grammar in lower classes, as well as for teaching different types of writing in higher classes. Several classroom practices such as correction of mistakes, focus on handwriting, use of flowery language, etc., will be discussed in this unit, keeping in mind the meaning and process of writing.

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## **6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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On reading this unit, you will:

- Understand what writing means and what is the nature of its relationship with listening, speaking and reading; you will also be able to see all these skills in a holistic perspective;
- Understand what we mean by ‘good writing’;
- Learn about the teacher’s role in teaching children writing;
- Learn about various forms of writing; and also
- Learn about various activities that can be used for developing writing skills.

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## **6.2 WHAT DOES ‘WRITING’ MEAN?**

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Learning to write is one of the toughest landmarks in language learning. One of the reasons for this is that writing involves the use of multiple abilities at the same time. For writing, one firstly needs to develop a good set of fine motor skills which allow one to hold a pencil or a pen to make deliberate marks. After this, one needs to learn to use symbols to represent speech and then needs to acquire the skill of using language to communicate with others through writing.

What is writing? According to what is given in dictionaries, writing refers to the act of making symbols and marks on a surface which can be understood by another person. Although this definition is straightforward, it ignores the nuances involved in our everyday use of the term. For example, this definition makes no reference to the important link between language and writing and, say, a person drawing a



picture. The picture is also made on a surface and may often be understood by many other persons but we don't call it writing.

The dictionary definition also ignores the important link between speech and writing. The actions of speaking and writing originated at significantly different times. It is not very clear when human language actually developed. Perhaps the organs we need to speak evolved more than 1.5 million years ago. It is a dark area and there are many hypotheses about it. Yet, it is estimated that spoken language arose around 1 million (10 lakh) years ago, while written language came into being around five thousand years ago. In all communities on earth, spoken language originated substantially before written language. Even today there are many communities which have only oral systems of communication. Broadly, written language came into existence as communities became increasingly larger over a period of time. The interactions among the members of the community and those with members of other communities multiplied and it became necessary to keep record of various transactions particularly those involving land, revenue and trade. Systems of writing most probably owe their origin to these developments.

'Writing' is a medium which can be used to express what has been spoken. Thus, writing does not represent a new language, but simply a way of representing the same language. Even so, there is a difference between these two mediums of expression. Firstly, the written word is more permanent than the spoken message. The spoken word lasts only as long as the sound of our speech lasts; written material usually lasts as long as the material on which it is written lasts. Thus, the spoken words are intangible, invisible, and temporary, while the written words are tangible, visible and permanent. Secondly, while speaking the listener is often in front of us. The content of our message consists of words as well as the gestures we use while speaking, including the tonal quality of our voices (technically called paralinguistic features). The context in which the conversation is taking place is also clear to both the listener and the speaker; so spoken sentences may look very different from their written counterparts in writing. Thirdly, while speaking, we also can correct ourselves right then and there and avoid a misunderstanding, but no such facility exists for written language. In the words of the famous writer Premchand, "The tongue does not get chopped on speaking, but the hands do get chopped on writing." Luckily, while writing, we also have more time at our disposal than we do while speaking. Thus, we have the chance of improving our sentences and rewriting them if we wish. Therefore, writing is relatively more complex and demanding than speech.

Fourthly, while spoken language is constantly changing, written language changes very slowly since there are many social pressures to sustain its form. For example,



Hindi continues to use ? in its script when we can rarely find an individual who pronounces this sound differently from ??; similar is the case of the utter ? which does not sound different from ?. Similarly in English the words ‘bus’, ‘cup’, ‘but’ continue to be written with a ‘u’ as at some point of time they were spoken using ‘u’; similar is the case for words like ‘shut’, ‘butter’, ‘crush’ and ‘drum’. This point is important in the context of children learning to write. In the beginning, all efforts of the child at writing are informed by the way words are spoken. If these spoken sounds do not correspond to the accepted forms of writing, it increases the probability of the child making ‘mistakes’. Thus, these mistakes often represent steps in the process of learning.

**Check Your Progress-1**

1. *Writing is a medium which*
  - (a) *Represents a new language*
  - (b) *Represents the same language in a different form*
  - (c) *Teaches writing*
  - (d) *Teaches reading*
  
2. *What skills are required for a person to be able to write?*

.....

.....

.....
  
3. *What is the difference between spoken and written language? Which of these is prone to more change?*

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.....
  
4. *Ask someone to read a passage. Then ask them to write down what they understood of the passage. Analyse the difficulties faced and mistakes made by the person while writing.*

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## 6.3 BEGINNING TO WRITE

### 6.3.1 FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Before a child can learn to write, it is necessary for him/her to develop fine motor skills (the ability to grasp). In order to encourage the development of these skills, children should be allowed to manipulate solid objects as they see fit. Holding, turning, twisting and playing with objects develops grasping ability in children. Another very important activity that provides children with enjoyment in addition to developing motor skills, essential for writing, is drawing. Therefore, children should be encouraged to draw. Children's early drawings often resemble meaningless scribbles which later evolve into discernible shapes and figures. Apart from drawing, some other activities that help develop the motor skills necessary for writing include games such as pouring water into a container, stringing beads and flowers, making objects out of clay or dough, etc. The home environment of the child provides him/her with enough opportunity to engage in such activities. However, this is not always the case. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to help children engage in such activities wherever required.

### 6.3.2 PRACTICING LETTERS, WORDS, SENTENCES

It is often believed that achievement of sentence writing is helped by practicing writing letters and then words again and again. This is true to a certain extent, but if children are made to engage in tedious repetition of letters and words, they may be disenchanted with writing before they even begin to write. Therefore, while individual letters and *varnmalas* are useful in introducing children to writing, they might not be meaningful to children unless their relationship with whole words or sentences is made clear.

In teaching children to write, two things are of great importance – respecting children's abilities and creating meaningful contexts in which they can learn. It is necessary to appreciate the fact that the child has an immense innate capability to learn language. They learn their native languages naturally through meaningful social experiences involving speaking and listening. Similarly, they grasp the rules of writing mostly through meaningful experiences involving written material. In teaching, we often act under the assumption that children need to be told everything and that they would not understand unless they are told. This, however, is not true. It is necessary to get rid of this mindset and to start respecting the capabilities of children. Children have a unique ability to write before coming to school. It is normal for children to create figures and symbols in sand, on the floor or on paper and to make up stories about them. For them, these drawings are not meaningless, but rather they represent a unique script through which they



express what they wish to say. Children should be given the opportunity to make full use of their abilities. Their learning process does not involve joining pieces of knowledge together to get the complete picture, but in fact it involves the opposite. The whole picture is formed first, and then the specifics become clear in different ways. Unless a meaningful whole is supplied, the small specifics, such as individual letters of the *varnmala* or alphabet, will not make sense and will be boring. This will eventually lead to developing an attitude that would be averse to even attempting to write.

**Check Your Progress-2**

- 1. *How does the process of learning take place?*
  - (a) *by putting individual pieces together to get the complete picture*
  - (b) *forming whole picture first and then perceiving the specifics*
  - (c) *memorising*
  - (d) *drawing pictures*

- 2. *What do the symbols and pictures drawn by children before going to school tell us about them?*

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- 3. *What do we mean by 'fine motor skills'? How can they be developed in children?*

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- 4. *What is the problem with starting the teaching of writing through repeatedly writing the alphabet (varnmala)?*

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**6.4 ELEMENTS OF GOOD HANDWRITING**

We often tend to emphasise the quality of children’s handwriting right from the



time the child has started to learn how to write. While the legibility of the child's writing is important, the meaningfulness of what she has written is even more important. The child may be able to imitate the written word beautifully, but the important question is, does (S)he understand what has been written?

### **6.4.1 LEGIBLE VS. GOOD HANDWRITING**

In early classes, teachers often focus on 'good' handwriting and 'well formed' letters. However, it is more important that the child's written material be meaningful. The true test of the beauty of writing is the extent to which it makes sense. The reason good handwriting is appreciated is that it is easier to read. The beauty of a person's handwriting is no indication of his grasp over language. If a person's handwriting is beautiful, it does not indicate that their language ability is correspondingly better. Similarly, if someone has a bad handwriting, their language ability need not be equally bad. Teachers need to appreciate the fact that in spite of uniformity of input and teachers insisting on writing only in ONE particular way, all children eventually evolve their own distinct handwriting. Hence the emphasis should be on the message rather than on the shape of letters and words. However, a teacher should make every possible effort to encourage a child to write in a legible handwriting.

### **6.4.2 HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP A GOOD HANDWRITING**

Children can be helped to develop good handwriting by developing some of the basics essential for writing, such as fine motor skills, visual perception, trunk control, pencil grasp and stability of shoulder through various exercises. The teacher can also develop different, entertaining approaches while teaching writing of specific letters. For example, children may be shown how the letter S resembles a snake, or the letter Q resembles a balloon. Similarly the letter ? in Hindi can be compared with a pot-bellied person. Similarly, through games, children can be made to improve some imperfect aspects of their writing such as spacing between words, letter size, alignment, etc. For example, to correct the problem of letter size, the teacher can draw circles of a specific size and ask the child to fill them with certain letters. Children should essentially be introduced to small texts that having meaning for the child. One could then build exercises based on this text but focusing on letters and words. For example, children could be asked to separate letters that involve a vertical line from those that do not.

### **6.4.3 HANDWRITING AND PERSONALITY**

Some teachers believe that bad handwriting leads to defects in personality. Therefore, they often put children to the boring task of writing letters neatly over



and over again. Teachers need to understand that such activities intended for improving handwriting are difficult, tedious and completely unproductive. Improving handwriting does not bring about improvement in personality, since handwriting does not influence personality. Efforts to improve handwriting are likely to result in making children disinterested in writing. The focus should be on activities which make writing meaningful and therefore an interesting activity.

### 6.4.4 HANDWRITING AS AN INDICATOR OF DYSLEXIA AND OTHER DISABILITIES

Dyslexia refers to reading disorders. There is a sense in which every person is dyslexic. All of us make mistakes in reading. But a small percentage of children may suffer from serious reading disorders. Children who have serious problems in writing in spite of adequate input may be dyslexic. They may see the picture as a whole, and may not see their constituent parts. They have trouble processing two dimensional stimuli. This introduces problems in writing. The handwriting of a person with dyslexia is generally illegible as the letters are of irregular shapes and size and there are inconsistencies in writing the same letters or words. He/she may also experience difficulties in copying down written material. An additional factor is the physical position adopted by the child in writing.

Dyslexia shares several of its characteristics with other conditions associated with poor writing skills, such as dyspraxia (poor motor skills and planning), deficits in visual-perceptual skills etc. However, even if these symptoms are observed, one cannot conclude the presence of a disorder. Therefore, in order to ascertain if a child has a condition because of which he/she needs special help, it is necessary to seek the help of experts, such as occupational therapists.

#### Check Your Progress-3

1. *A person who has dyslexia*
  - (a) *always sees the complete picture*
  - (b) *cannot see pictures*
  - (c) *sees the pieces making up the picture*
  - (d) *cannot draw pictures*
2. *Analyse the impact of the position of the hand and the grip on the pencil, on writing.*

.....

.....

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3. *Think of ways for making letter writing interesting by introducing letters in different ways. Try to come up with writing exercises which target problems of handwriting.*

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.....  
.....

4. *Imagine that you have a child in your class who writes words in an irregular manner and has illegible handwriting. What would you do? Explain.*

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## 6.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD WRITING

Our written language is expected to conform to certain rules of spelling and grammar. While speaking, we have the opportunity to clarify our meaning if the listener misunderstands us. In written communication, no such opportunity exists. However, this difference in standards for judging spoken and written language poses some problems for the child learning to write, since spoken language forms the basis for learning to write. If certain features of written language which do not pertain to spoken language for example spelling, punctuation etc., are emphasised right from the beginning, children may feel discouraged from writing. It is therefore important that children are allowed to write as they wish in the early stages of writing. Focus on accuracy should follow later.

Writing is the most difficult of the four language skills. It requires a command over vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure. When children graduate to writing short paragraphs, it also involves establishing links among different sentences. All these help in creating meaning. Meaning is an integral part of language but in writing one has to pay extra attention to meaning because there is no space for clarification if anything not communicated clearly. The act of writing may even be described as the act of making meaning and giving coherence to disorganised ideas. Writing aims at meaningful expression and communication. Often, these objectives get overshadowed in the classroom with an emphasis on 'correct' writing.





### 6.5.1 GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT LANGUAGE

In evaluating children's writing, teachers tend to look for spelling and grammar mistakes. They need to understand that it is natural for children to make such mistakes while speaking and writing. None of us speaks perfectly or writes perfectly right from the beginning. There is a higher probability of making mistakes in complex sentences.

Considering the fact that there is often no one to one correspondence between the sounds of a language and their representation in writing, it is natural for different children to write differently. Again, language shows high levels of societal and regional variations. The same word is spoken differently in the different social environments of children. For example, if the Hindi word 'shak' is pronounced as 'sak' in a community, children will naturally use the letter 'sa' instead of 'sha' while writing such words. They may write 'sak' instead of 'shak' and 'santi' instead of 'shanti'. Instead of considering this a blunder, we should think of it as a part and parcel of the learning process.

We may give similar examples for grammar. Many communities do not make gender distinctions in verbs while speaking Hindi. If we keep emphasising such mistakes in front of children and their parents, they will both be discouraged. It is often observed in such cases that children even drop-out of school.

To teach correct spelling and grammar to children, they should be given increasingly interesting and challenging writing material to read and should be encouraged to write in various contexts. Good spelling and grammar are not meaningful ends in themselves. Rather, the meaningful end involves effective, interesting as well as satisfactory communication.

### 6.5.2 KEEP THE READER IN MIND

Everything we write is meant to be read – even if by no one else, at least by ourselves. The way we write changes according to who we believe is going to read what we have written. The style of writing, grammar and choice of words are influenced by who we feel is going to read what we have written. Keeping this in mind, it is possible to undertake many activities in class which aim at sensitising children towards the reader. Questions encouraging children to think about the reader before they start writing can be designed. In this way, children can be encouraged to write keeping in mind the reader as well as for different types of readers. For example, you may write very different kinds of letters about your studies and examination to your parents on the one hand and your friends on the other.



### Lucidity and brevity

Lucidity and brevity are desired characteristics of writing, since they communicate the meaning the writer wants to convey with minimum confusion and effort on the part of the reader. For clear and concise writing, children need experience not only as writers but also as readers. Reading will acquaint them with different methods employed by writers to convey their ideas to their readers.

Concise and clear writing requires planning in advance of what we want to write the ideas we want to communicate, the relationship between the ideas, the order in which we want to present them and the point of view we want to present. The child also needs to be given time to review and make changes in what (s)he has written. It has now been shown that if children are given time to read and edit what they have written, they improve their writing ability substantially. The red marks teachers are used to putting on the written output of children frustrates them considerably.

### 6.5.3 SIMPLE VS. FLOWERY LANGUAGE

It is a common belief that good writing is one which uses flowery language, with elaborate words and sentence structures. Although sometimes such writing can give the impression of being particularly inspired and profound, it misses its purpose if it ends up confusing the readers instead of informing them. Writing which conveys the message clearly to its readers is good writing. Therefore, children should be encouraged to use such language in writing that their meaning becomes clear.

The important thing is the ability to express oneself, not the impression one makes on others as a result of what one writes. This does not mean that only simple writing is good writing. As children's vocabulary grows through reading and other language-related experiences, they may begin to use some uncommon words. As long as these words are appropriate to the context in which they are used, they should be encouraged. A wide range of vocabulary that allows one greater choice and freedom to express oneself is a good thing. However, priority should still be given to effective communication. Children should be taught to respect their readers and suit themselves to their needs. They should be given examples of simple, lucid writing. Honest simple writing is better than flowery pretentious writing any day. Compare (a) and (b):

- (a) Most humbly with due respect I wish to inform you that if your good self is pleased to grant me two days' leave, I'd be most grateful and obliged to your honourable office.



(b) Kindly grant me two days' leave.

We hope you'd agree that (b) is far better than (a).

Notes

**Check your Progress-4**

1. *What is the objective of writing?*

- (a) *To use flowery language*
- (b) *To use grammatically correct language*
- (c) *To write correctly.*
- (d) *Meaningful expression as well as communication.*

2. *What are the characteristics of good writing?*

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.....

.....

3. *Which is more important – meaningful writing or correct writing? Give reasons for your answer.*

.....

.....

.....

4. *While learning to write, why do children make mistakes involving spelling and grammar?*

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.....

5. *Think of an activity in which a child's favourite book is being used to develop good writing ability.*

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6. *What's the role of revising and redrafting a piece of writing in improving writing skills?*

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.....

## 6.6 DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS IN LOWER CLASSES

The development of writing in lower classes will build on the foundations provided by the other language skills- listening, speaking and reading. Also, children will learn to write effectively when the act of writing is meaningful, when it is relevant to children's context and when it is enjoyable for them. In order to optimise conditions for them to learn to write, certain activities may be undertaken in groups or individually. The activities given below are merely suggestions, and represent a very small portion of feasible activities.

- **Picture composition:** This involves presenting children with a picture (of objects, single events, multiple events etc), and asking them to write about it. This writing can include a wide variety of compositions. They may be asked to write a story, to describe the picture, to write a dialogue between the characters, to fill in a missing gap in the picture and write about it, etc. When a series of pictures depicting a story is provided, they can be asked to write the story.
- **Developing stories from given outlines:** Children can be given rough outline of a story in the form of a series of words and phrases, and then asked to build a story using these words and phrases.
- **Independent writing:** Children can be asked to write about something that they evidently show great interest in or something that they talk about a lot. This will not only help to develop writing skills, but may point the teacher towards more techniques for facilitating learning.
- **Continuing the story:** Children can be told the beginning of a story, and can be asked to write what they think happened next.
- **Dictation:** Teacher can speak aloud some words and ask the children to write them to see if they are able to link the spoken sounds to their written forms.



- Last-letter-first: Children can be distributed in groups and can be asked to write down words one by one, such that the first letter of the word they write is the last letter of the word that came before. Through this activity, the teacher can identify the problem areas without pointing them out directly to the child.
- The teacher can let children talk about a topic of their interest and write down what they have said. This will clarify the communicative purpose of writing and will clarify the link between speech and writing.
- Rhyming words: Children can be asked to come up with words which rhyme with the given word, or are similar in sound of the given word.

While teaching children to write, the teacher must allow children to express their own views. The common practice of forcing children to rote learn a small set of model essays is very dangerous. It destroys children’s motivation to write on their own. Children will write freely if are given space to express their ideas and thoughts in writing freely.

**Check Your Progress-5**

1. *What should be done while teaching children to write?*
  - (a) *children should be asked to memorise and write about specific topics.*
  - (b) *children should be asked to write the varnmala.*
  - (c) *children should be given the opportunity to write down their thoughts.*
  - (d) *children should be asked to write the same letter over and over again.*

2. *How do rhyming words help in teaching children to write? Explain.*  
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3. *Try out in class the activities suggested here for teaching writing in primary classes.*  
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4. *Think of other activities involving stories which can be conducted to teach children writing.*

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## 6.7 HIGHER FORMS OF WRITING

Higher forms of writing like paragraph writing, letter writing, essay writing, story writing and poetry writing etc., are taught in schools for the development of ‘expression’, creativity and ‘communicative ability’.

Paragraph writing helps children learn how to think and write focusing on one theme. It is a good exercise for encouraging young children to express themselves coherently and also forms the basis for essay writing. It is advisable to ask children to write about things that they find relevant to their lives. These paragraphs can vary in length according to the age, writing ability and understanding of children.

Essay writing: An essay refers to a composition which ties up many ideas on a theme or topic in a coherent and sequential manner. Essays are basically of two types: reflective and emotional. An essay has different parts- an introduction, followed by the main body, followed by the conclusion. What these divisions suggest is that an essay must reflect an easy flow of thought. These thoughts must be relevant to the theme, and must flow in a logical manner. The writer must develop the topic with clarity and consistency. Unlike paragraphs, essays involve a deeper and more elaborate expression on the theme.

Worrying about the quality of the essays, teachers sometimes dictate essays to children, which children are supposed to memorise and write when asked. Such practices completely defeat the purpose of developing the ability to express oneself on a topic effectively. Importance must be given to children’s own thoughts and experiences in essays and they should be allowed to express these in writing.

Letter writing: Traditionally, letters have been written to convey messages to people living at a distance. Unlike essays, letters have a very specific communicative purpose. Therefore, they do not require the elaboration of points as required in essays. On the other hand, they do require a certain skill in writing to communicate. The style of writing will vary according to the writer’s relationship with the recipient. The writer needs to understand how the recipient will react to the content of their message.



Story writing: Story writing helps children develop the ability to think and to write. It is an activity that can be undertaken at any age. It should be introduced when children are beginning to write, so that their imagination aids their writing skills and also for older children. In the case of the latter, the aims of this exercise remain roughly the same. However, promotion of thinking skills and imaginative faculties is emphasised over learning of language. As children grow, they are expected to regard issues from different perspectives, engage in problem solving and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of writing. These skills develop through an affinity with different forms of literature. By the time they get to senior classes, children have been exposed to different forms of literature such as poems, stories, plays etc., and these further help in the development of thinking and story writing skills. In turn, story writing helps generate interest in literature and language.

Besides story writing, children can be asked to write alternative endings to stories, to take the story forward from a point of significance, to write a story from the point of view of a specific character, etc.

Poetry writing: Children in smaller classes usually know only those poems which include rhyming words. Younger children enjoy rhyme and rhyming words help in generating interest and in giving children an impression of words, because of which they can read easily. Rhyming words can also generate interest in writing and develop the skill of writing on the basis of sound. Therefore, small poem making activities may be taken up with young children. Children can be asked to make up poems either individually or in groups, with their peers. This can be an enjoyable activity.

Poetry writing becomes more complex in higher classes, because their understanding of what poems involve is richer and deeper. Poem writing activities can also be associated with developing aesthetic appreciation of this form of writing among children.

**Check Your Progress-6**

1. *What are the kinds of poems known to children in smaller classes?*

- (a) *poems making use of difficult words*
- (b) *reflective poems*
- (c) *poems making use of rhyming words*
- (d) *small poems*

2. *How is letter writing different from essay writing?*

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3. *Write one paragraph and one essay on 'The curiosity of children'.*

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4. *In schools, teachers often write the essays and letters and children are expected to memorise them and write them when required. Is this the right thing to do? Give reasons for your answer.*

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### 6.8 LET US SUM UP

Writing is a language skill. Writing involves making marks on some surface to be read and understood by someone. While teaching children to write, it is important to ensure that they have developed some pre-writing abilities. These include development of fine motor skills, postural and physical development, and ability to use spoken language to express oneself clearly. The child's readiness to write, as evident through their attempts to use writing material and to communicate.

It is essential to remember that writing must be meaningful especially for a child who is beginning to write. Children make mistakes while beginning to write because of the difference between spoken and written language. Since writing is a skill that develops with the development of other language skills like reading, speaking and listening, these should be promoted in such a way that they complement each other.

Handwriting cannot provide us with information about the child's personality and 'bad' handwriting by itself does not suggest something undesirable. Children can be helped to improve their handwriting using various techniques. Importance should be given to certain desirable qualities in writing such as lucidity and brevity, as well as simplicity. Since written language is different from spoken language, children can be helped to develop their writing skills through greater exposure to written material. Such measures can be used to encourage both spelling and grammatical correctness in language.





Writing skill develops as the child grows older. With increasing age, children should be introduced to higher forms of writing such as essay, letter, poetry, etc. Each of these requires very similar yet distinct abilities which the teacher should be aware of.

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## **6.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES**

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Trask, R.L. (1995). *Language: the Basics*. London: Routledge

Kroll, Barbara (2003). *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Yule, George (1985). *The Study of Language*. London: Cambridge University Press.

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## **6.10 UNITS-END EXERCISES**

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1. Why is it necessary to acquire fine motor skills to write?
2. “The child has a unique ability to write before coming to school.” Observe a 4-5 year old child around you and give examples of this statement.
3. Spoken language changes rapidly while written language changes slowly. Explain with examples.
4. What is the importance of simplicity, lucidity and brevity in writing? Explain.
5. Analyse the differences in written and spoken language.
6. What writing difficulties are experienced by children with dyslexia?
7. What role do ‘story writing’ and ‘poetry writing’ play in learning language?

### **ACTIVITY**

Think about activities that can be used to develop fine motor skills in children.

Think about the activities which can make a child more communicative in the classroom. How can different types of materials be used to achieve this end?