Oral and Written Language Milestones

**Stage One: Prelinguistic – Speech-Type Sounds but No Words**
(approximately birth-11 months)

**Birth**
Crying is the major way of communicating needs. Vision is best at 8-10 inches.

**2 weeks**
Less crying, random gestures and vocalizations.

**6 weeks**
Squeal, gurgles, and *coos* (makes vowel sounds such as “uhh”).

**1-2 months**
Uses smile to communicate; likes to look at patterns more than solids.

**3 months to 6 months**
Child babbles (makes consonant-vowel syllable sounds like ma, de, da). Can focus on large and bright pictures in a book. Likes to chew and pat books.

**6 months to 9 months**
Accidentally imitates sounds, more repetition of syllables (such as ah ba ba); utterances express emotions. Can reach for books, often drops them and picks them up again.

**9 months to 11 months**
Deliberately imitates sounds, shows definite signs of understanding some words and simple commands; uses *expressive jargon*, a flow of gibberish that has the intonation of real speech. Listens to books, stories, and tries to turn pages.

**Stage Two to Four: Linguistic Speech – The Child Uses Language in Increasingly Complex Ways**
(approximately 1 year and up)

**Stage Two: One Word Utterances**
(approximately 1-2 years)

At approximately 12 months
Child uses *holophrases* (one-words utterances): complex meanings can underlie one word; vocabulary of three to six words

12 months to 18 months
Intonation is complex and speechlike; extensive use of nouns. *Vocabulary*: Three to fifty words. *Social*: Child does not attempt to convey additional information or show frustration when not understood. *Literacy*: Likes to turn pages, point to and label pictures on his/her own.
Stage Three: Making Words into Phrases  
(approximately 2-3 years)

Around 2 years
Great strides in receptive language child; uses telegraphic speech, two or three word utterances.  
**Vocabulary:** Fifty to two hundred words.  
**Social:** Definite increase to communicative efforts, beginnings of conversation, although toddlers rarely extend conversations beyond two turns or sustain topics.  
**Literacy:** Likes to listen to books, stories for longer periods of time and can hold the book correctly. Begins to recognize “logos”, e.g., “golden arches” for McDonald’s. Begins to show differences in “writing” versus “drawing.”

3 years
Often considered to be the most rapid period of language growth.  
**Vocabulary:** Many new words acquired daily, 200-300 word vocabulary.  
**Social:** Child strives to communicate and shows frustration if not understood; the ability of unfamiliar adults to understand the child increases.  
**Literacy:** Likes to “read” stories to himself and others; will protest if adult “changes” story. Recognizes more logos and other environmental print. Begins to show “disconnected scribble” and some letter-like forms.

Stage Four: Using Complete Sentences  
(approximately 4-6 years)

4 years
Pronunciation and grammar improve.  
**Vocabulary:** 1,400 to 1,600 words.  
**Social:** Child seeks way to correct misunderstanding; begins to adjust speech to listener’s information needs; disputes with peers can be resolved with words and invitations to play are more common.  
**Literacy:** Understands story sequence and the functions/purposes of print. More letter-like forms are seen in scribble. Knows many letter names.

5 to 6 years
Complex, grammatically correct sentences; uses pronouns; uses past, present, and future tenses; average sentence length per oral sentence increases to 6.8 words.  
**Vocabulary:** Uses approximately 2,500 words, understands about 6,000, responds to 25,000.  
**Social:** Child has good control of elements of conversation.  
**Literacy:** Pays more attention to print; knows some words, and is making some letter-sound associations. Tries to spell words when writing.
Stage Five: Using Language Symbolically (reading and writing)
(approximately 6 years and up)

6 to 7 years
Uses more complex sentences more adjectives; uses If…then conditional clauses; average number of words per sentence is 7.6.

Vocabulary: Speaking vocabulary of about 3,000 words.

Literacy: Begins to “decode” new words on their own.

7 to 8 years
Social: Uses adjectival clauses with which, more gerunds, subordinate clauses.

Literacy: Is beginning reading and writing with comprehension by having a sight word vocabulary and decoding strategies.

Literacy gateway on ASHA’s website: http://www.asha.org/about/leadership-projects/literacy/