



# Roles and Responsibilities of Speech-Language Pathologists With Respect to Reading and Writing in Children and Adolescents

*Ad Hoc Committee on Reading and Written Language Disorders*

*This position statement, guidelines, and technical report were drafted by an ad hoc committee formed by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Reading and Written Language Disorders were Nickola Wolf Nelson (chair), Hugh Catts, Barbara J. Ehren, Froma P. Roth, Cheryl M. Scott, and Maureen Staskowski. Vice Presidents for Professional Practices in Speech-Language Pathology Nancy Creaghead (1997-1999) and Alex Johnson (2000-2002) provided guidance and support. Roseanne P. Clausen provided ex officio assistance from the National Office; Diane Paul-Brown and Susan Karr served as consultants to the committee.*

## Position Statement

It is the position of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) play a critical and direct role in the development of literacy for children and adolescents with communication disorders,<sup>1</sup> including those with severe or multiple disabilities. SLPs also make a contribution to the literacy efforts of a school district or community on behalf of other children and adolescents. These roles are implemented in collaboration with others who have expertise in the development of written language and vary with settings and experience of those involved.<sup>2</sup>

The connections between spoken and written language are well established in that (a) spoken language provides the foundation for the development of reading and writing; (b) spoken and written language have a reciprocal relationship, such that each builds on the other to result in general language and literacy competence, starting early and continuing through childhood into adulthood; (c) children with spoken language problems frequently have difficulty learning to read and write, and children with reading and writing problems frequently have difficulty with spoken language<sup>3</sup>; and (d) instruction in spoken language can result in growth in written language, and instruction in written language can result in growth in spoken language.

As with difficulty in learning to listen and speak, difficulty in learning to read and write can involve any of the components of language—phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Problems can occur in the production, comprehension, and awareness of language at the sound, syllable, word, sentence, and discourse levels. Individuals with reading and writing problems also may experience difficulties in using language strategically to communicate, think, and learn. These fundamental connections necessitate that intervention for language disorders target written as well as spoken language needs.

Reference this material as: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2001). Roles and responsibilities of speech-language pathologists with respect to reading and writing in children and adolescents (position statement, executive summary of guidelines, technical report). *ASHA Supplement 21*, 17-28. Rockville, MD: Author

Index terms: Adolescents, children, literacy, practice scope and patterns, reading assessment, speech-language pathology, written communication disorders, written language assessment, written language treatment

Document type: Position statement

<sup>1</sup> The scope of practice for SLPs includes literacy assessment and intervention for adults (with developmental or acquired communication disorders) as well as for children and adolescents, but that work is beyond the scope of this set of papers.

<sup>2</sup> The term written language refers to reading and writing and related processes.

<sup>3</sup> In these documents, the terms problems, difficulties, and impairments are used interchangeably to describe concerns about spoken or written language development; where applicable, literature reviews maintain terminology of the original.

SLPs' knowledge of normal and disordered language acquisition, and their clinical experience in developing individualized programs for children and adolescents, prepare them to assume a variety of roles related to the development of reading and writing. Appropriate roles and responsibilities for SLPs include, but are not limited to (a) preventing written language problems by fostering language acquisition and emergent literacy; (b) identifying children at risk for reading and writing problems;

(c) assessing reading and writing; (d) providing intervention and documenting outcomes for reading and writing; and (e) assuming other roles, such as providing assistance to general education teachers, parents, and students; advocating for effective literacy practices; and advancing the knowledge base. These roles are dynamic in relation to the evolving knowledge base and have implications for research and professional education.