



A national day of speaking and listening  
25th November 2020

# Your guide to running the day



# What is No Pens Day Wednesday?



**No Pens Day Wednesday is a national speaking and listening event which takes place in schools and settings annually. This year, it will take place on Wednesday 25th November 2020.**

Now in its tenth year, No Pens Day will be run by I CAN, the children's communication charity. A host of information and resources, including lesson plans, activity

ideas and a social media toolkit, will be available to download on [I CAN's website](#).

If 25th November doesn't work for your school/setting, resources will be available online throughout the year. Some schools have extended the activities over a week, and some have continued to incorporate no pens activities throughout the year to really sharpen their pupils' spoken language skills!

**Over 7000 schools and settings have taken part in No Pens Day Wednesday so far!**

**"The children's engagement was phenomenal and staff enjoyed thinking creatively about not using pens or pencils for the day. Lots of outdoor and practical learning!"**

**No Pens Day participant**



# Why take part?



**Communication is at the core of everything we do: at work, home, school and socially. Learning to communicate effectively has a profound impact on children's education and future lives.**

Every aspect of being at school or nursery involves spoken language. It is fundamental to the academic and social curriculum.

**Oracy**, or the ability to communicate through spoken language, is overlooked in the UK education system in comparison to written language skills. However, as with literacy and numeracy, schools can play a crucial role in developing children's oracy skills.

## Why is it so important?

### In early years

- Language levels at age two predict reading, writing and maths ability when starting school. They also predict later ability to regulate emotions and behaviour.
- Around 50% of children in some areas of deprivation begin school with delayed language. Without early support, these children may struggle to catch up with their peers.

### In primary school

- Good spoken language skills are a strong predictor of academic success. Children with poor language skills at age 5 are at high risk of low achievement at age 7 and beyond.
- A recent study found that over 90% of talking in a classroom was done by the teacher and the average contribution of pupils is just four words.

### In secondary schools and colleges

- In a recent survey, employers said that good communication was the most important skill needed for young people entering their first job.
- One report estimates that in 2020, over half a million UK workers will be held back by 'soft skills' deficits, including communication and interpersonal skills.

Beyond education, spoken language skills are key to social mobility. Confidence and fluency in speaking can help children from all backgrounds thrive in later life.

**No Pens Day Wednesday** puts spoken language in the spotlight. Through a day of fun and engaging activities, schools and settings can:

- Raise awareness of the importance of spoken language with staff, children

- and parents.
- Improve children and young people's communication skills and increase their engagement in lessons.
- Support their curriculum's focus on spoken language, and develop staff skills and confidence in teaching spoken language.
- Identify children who may have speech, language and communication needs and provide additional support.



# How can we take part?



To help you get started and plan your No Pens Day, we have provided a range of resources which can be used or adapted for your setting. You can access all resources here or follow the guide below to plan your event:

## Planning

- **Sign up** to take part and access tips and resources.
- Decide who'll lead on plans for the day. Book in a staff meeting to inform all staff about the event and explain why it's important to focus on spoken language.
- Consider your aims and objectives for the day and ways you will achieve and measure these.
- Download our **resources** for

ideas of what to do on the day and ensure you have prepared any additional resources. Think about how you might differentiate activities for children with SEN or speech, language and communication needs.

- Plan in reflection time after the day to consider evaluation and next steps. How will you embed spoken language going forward?

## Promoting

- Print out our posters and pin them up at your school/setting.
- Send a letter out to parents about No Pens Day and how they can get involved. Include information about the day in your newsletter and website.
- Inform pupils about No Pens Day in assembly or class, and gather their input and ideas for activities that don't involve pens!
- Download our **social media**

**toolkit** and plan who will be responsible for social media on the day.

- Assign a staff or pupil photographer for the day.

## Taking part

- Start the day with an assembly. Could pupils take the lead on this?
- Engage pupils by asking their opinions on not using pens and the benefits of this before lessons begin.
- Share your photos, videos and highlights on social media. Tweet us using **@ICanCharity** and use the **#NoPensDay** hashtag.
- Give out 'No pens' homework for pupils to practice spoken language at home

## Post-No Pens

- Complete an evaluation survey. (All subscribers will receive this by email.)
- Run a staff meeting to discuss

what went well and what could be improved. Did you achieve what you set out to do?

- Plan a follow-up assembly to share pupils' work and learning from the day.
- If you created a related blog, video, or were featured in local media, make sure to **share this with I CAN!**
- Download a press release template and contact your local media.
- Use your professional networks to share your good practice around spoken language and raise awareness of No Pens Day so that more children and young people around the country can benefit.
- Plan how you could further embed spoken language into your curriculum.

# Top tips for early years settings

No Pens Day  
Wednesday

## Make it fun!

- What resources do you already have in the classroom? Puppets, props and dress up can provide perfect conversation tools.
- Use musical instruments to accompany activities – see the [Sound Communities](#) website for ideas on how to enhance communication through music.
- Encourage reluctant speakers to join in – children could become the 'voice' for a toy/ character.
- Parents are crucial to their child's speech and language development – could you involve them in story-telling and sing-song sessions?
- Involve the five senses: experiment with touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste and talk about what you discover.

## Make it impactful

- Identify any children who are struggling to express themselves and put in place plans to support them and their families.
- You could extend activities from the day into future lessons. Could the children make up a song or rhyme based on the artwork they created? Could they think more about the sounds they heard and talked about during a 'sound trail'?
- Collect evidence of impact throughout the day – capture photos, videos and voice recordings of children taking part in activities. Once the day is over, do pick up your pens and record observations of children's engagement, as well as their strengths and challenges.

[Download our early years resources for more ideas.](#)



# Top tips for primary schools

No Pens Day  
Wednesday

## Make it fun!

- Incorporate music and movement.
- Learn about the oral traditions of retelling stories and poems
- How could jokes and non-literal language be included? Consider **how you could get** involved in the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' **Voice Box competition** as part of the day.
- Would pupils with SEN find it more useful to focus on listening and being listened to?

## Make it impactful

- When planning for the day, think about how No Pens Day Wednesday links to your school development plan or individual priorities. Consider a 'subject-themed' day, such as scientific vocabulary.
- Incorporate No Pens Day into what children have already been learning about, for example, create an improvisation based around a book they've been studying.

- Involve children in planning the day: set a task to plan no pens activities. One idea could be for students to plan and prepare PowerPoint presentations to share on the day about their interests and hobbies.
- Use a camera or voice recorder to capture parts of the day and collect evidence of impact. Try a Big Brother style 'diary room' to capture children's thoughts!

- Link it to writing – children could produce pieces of writing after No Pens Day based on activities they took part in on the day.
- Although you need to put down your pen during the day, write and record any results as soon as the day is over.
- Identify any children who struggled with spoken language activities and put plans in place for supporting them and their parents.

[Download our primary resources for more ideas.](#)



# Top tips for secondary and further education



## Make it fun!

- Think about your students' interests and how they could be incorporated. Would they enjoy a poetry slam, debate or rap battle?
- Use video clips to spark discussion and debate.
- Use improvisation to re-enact a historical event or piece of literature.

## Make it impactful

- When planning for the day, think about how No Pens Day Wednesday links to your school development plan or individual priorities. Consider a 'subject themed' day, such as scientific vocabulary.
- Older students are often focused on 'note taking' when preparing for exams. Discuss the importance of spoken language in learning and preparing for assessments – did it help to have more time to discuss ideas?
- Brainstorm how communication skills are important in interviews or the workplace, as well as in relationships and life. Role play some scenarios and discuss students' experiences afterwards.
- Make links with writing – following the day, students could write up the results of a verbal debate or how they completed a maths problem.
- Students could also be encouraged to write a reflection on their whole experience of No Pens Day Wednesday – what did they learn about communication? What did they learn about themselves? Make sure to collect examples of students' reflections as evidence of impact!

**Download our secondary and further education resources for more ideas.**



# Top tips for special schools



## Make it fun!

- Use art, imagery, poems and stories to bring activities to life.
- Focus on listening and being listened to – play listening games such as Simon Says, and copying rhythms and sounds.
- Involve the five senses: experiment with touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste and talk about what you discover.
- Many life skills activities can easily be pen-free – think about practical activities such as cooking, a shopping trip, laundry or personal hygiene.

## Make it impactful

- Use lessons before the day to introduce any supporting resources for concepts, ideas or vocabulary that will be important for the activities.
- Introduce any relevant signs or symbols that are likely to be new or unfamiliar before the day and make these easily accessible. This way, pupils can really concentrate on communicating during the day rather than grappling with new ideas.
- Use opportunities following the day to revisit ideas and activities to reinforce new vocabulary and concepts.
- Collect evidence of impact throughout the day – capture photos, videos and voice recordings of children taking part in activities.

**Download our special school resources for more ideas.**

**“We as staff often tell children to ‘stop talking’ so this was an opportunity to discuss how important talk is!”**





# Evaluate the day



**Reflection is an important part of No Pens Day. Gather the views of pupils, staff and parents to understand the impact the day had and what you could do differently next time.**

## Questions you could ask your pupils:

- What did you most enjoy about No Pens Day and why?
- What was the most challenging part of the day?
- Was there anything you would like to be done differently?
- What did you think of this way of learning? Would you like to do more 'no pens' activities?

## Questions you could ask your teaching staff:

- Which activities and approaches worked well?
- What were the most challenging elements of the day?
- What was the impact on learning, engagement and behaviour?

- Did you identify any pupils who need additional support with their speech, language and communication?
- How will you adapt your teaching approach/ curriculum based on the learning from today?

**Don't forget to take part in our evaluation survey to ensure we can keep improving what we offer you!**

**"Many of the staff are carrying the concept on through the year to have a ring-fenced time for 'no pens' activities, so it has definitely increased awareness and given confidence to try new things."**



# Keep it up!



**No Pens Day Wednesday is a great introduction to the importance of speech and language skills, but why stop there?**

**Continuing to embed spoken language in your curriculum is key to helping children develop crucial communication skills. Try some of the following ideas:**

- **Read our guidance** on continuing to embed spoken language at your school/ setting.
- Find out about **I CAN's training packages** for practitioners working in early years, primary and secondary schools.
- Visit **I CAN's Talking Point** for information about supporting children's speech and language development. The website includes a progress checker, where parents and practitioners can check a child's progress against what is expected for their age.
- I CAN's enquiry service provides advice and

information for anyone who has concerns about a child or young person's speech, language and communication. For more information and to have an informal chat with an I CAN speech and language therapist, call 020 7843 2544 or email [enquiries@ican.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ican.org.uk).

- Look at **The Communication Trust's What Works** website, a moderated online library of evidenced interventions that aim to support children's speech, language and communication.
- Join the **Voice 21 campaign** as a partner school to build a culture of oracy across your school.

- The **English Speaking Union** (ESU) offer a range of resources to develop pupils' oracy skills.

**"Some children found expressing their ideas verbally more challenging than expected. It has made us consider their needs more closely."**



# About I CAN



helps children  
communicate

**I CAN is the children's communication charity: our mission is that no child should be left out or left behind because of a difficulty speaking or understanding.**

We are experts in helping children develop the speech, language and communication skills they need to thrive.

Our programmes and services throughout the UK reach out to children with speech, language and communication needs, their families and practitioners. These include:

- An **enquiry line** and the **Talking Point** website for parents and practitioners

who are concerned about a child's speech, language and communication development.

- Specialist schools for children with speech, language and communication needs:  
**Meath School** in Surrey and **Dawn House School** in Nottinghamshire.
- Comprehensive speech and language therapy **assessment services**.
- **Training** for practitioners from all over the UK so they can deliver vital support and interventions to children and young people in their communities.

We also campaign for increased recognition of speech, language and communication needs and raise awareness of the importance of children's language development among parents, schools and government.

[www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

