

Mean Length of Utterance

Based on Brown's Stages of Language Development

For English-speaking children, the mean length of utterance (MLU) is a fairly reliable predictor of the complexity of their language. MLU typically increases 1.2 morphemes per year from 18 months to five years of age (Owens, 1996).

Brown's Stages of Language Development	Age	MLU	Milestones
I	12 – 26 months	1.0 – 2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses one-, two-, and three-word utterances • Uses intonation to ask yes/no questions • Uses limited <i>wh</i>- questions
II	27 – 30 months	2.0 – 2.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to use grammatical morphemes • Uses <i>in</i> and <i>on</i>
III	31 – 34 months	2.5 – 3.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases in length due to use of auxiliaries • Increases use of <i>wh</i>- questions • Uses interrogative reversals
IV	35 – 40 months	3.0 – 3.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses object-noun-phrase complements • Uses indirect or embedded <i>wh</i>-questions
V	41 – 46 months	3.75 – 4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinates simple sentences • Uses locatives (e.g., <i>up</i>, <i>down</i>) • Uses <i>and</i> as main conjunction
V+	47+ months	4.5 +	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds negative interrogatives • Adds indefinite forms, such as <i>nobody</i>, <i>no one</i> • Has some difficulty with double negatives

We'd like to thank the following sources from which we obtained information for this section: Bowen (http://members.tripod.com/Caroline_Bowen/?BrownsStages.htm); Brown (1973); Nicolosi, Harryman, & Kresheck (2006); and Owens (1996). For more information, please see the full References, Websites, & Resources list on pages 22-24.