

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is the tools and strategies used to help an individual with complex communication needs express their thoughts, wants, needs, feelings, and ideas. Vocabulary used with an AAC system can be categorized into core and fringe words. Core words are the words that comprise 80% of daily vocabulary used to communicate and fringe words are more specific words, typically nouns. AAC is **augmentative** when used to supplement existing speech, and **alternative** when used in place of speech that is absent or not functional. (American Speech -Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], n.d.). Lesson plans across all content areas should include communication instruction using core and fringe words for students with complex communication needs.

Students can use AAC devices and/or strategies to respond to questions in testing as well as to gain attention, share their ideas, socialize, comment, and more. The following are resources to assist in understanding how to use AAC with students. The Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) or Assistive Technology (AT) specialist for your school can also be a great resource for educators.

- Selecting Communication Boards and Determining Access Methods:
 - [Communication Matrix](#)
 - Start with a [quick start guide](#)
 - [Universal Core Selection Tool](#)
 - Access
 - [Partner assisted scanning](#) (scroll to the bottom of the page)
 - Direct select using hands or other movements
 - Options for students with significant cognitive/physical disabilities
 - [Communication Resource Document](#) ([PDF](#); [Accessible Doc](#)) is a tool for teachers to assist them in helping plan for the communication needs of their students. This document covers the basics of communication and references 20 forms of communication typically used by students with significant cognitive disabilities.
 - [Communication Dictionary](#): a tool designed to help IEP teams determine the meaning behind specific behaviors that a student is using to communicate.
 - [Communication Dictionary from T/TAC Online](#) ([PDF](#); [Doc](#))
 - [Personal Communication Dictionary from Oxford Health](#) ([PDF](#))
- Incorporating Core Word Instruction into Daily Routines and Lessons:
 - Module: [Teaching Communication During Daily Routines and Activities Module](#) by Project Core
 - Module: [Teaching Communication During Academic Instruction](#) by Project Core
- TTAC Online Resources:
 - Webinar: [A Few Good Words: Using Core Vocabulary to Support Students Who Are Non-Verbal \(Updated July 2020\) by Barbara Cannon, Rachel Herman](#)
 - Webinar: [AAC and Core Vocabulary by Barbara Cannon](#)

References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (n.d.). Augmentative and Alternative Communication (Practice Portal). Retrieved April, 20, 2021, from www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Augmentative-and-Alternative-Communication/.

Note: Consult with your school division's Assistive Technology (AT) team or AT Specialist for assistance with determining AT/AAC options to use with your students. In addition, utilize your region's TTAC AT Lending Library to trial AT as needed. June 2021

Assistive Technology (AT)

Assistive Technology (AT) devices help students perform tasks that otherwise they may not be able to do. Students may need to use AT to access their curriculum and demonstrate their knowledge. Matching the most appropriate assistive technology tool to each student's unique needs, environment, and task to be completed can support academic success for students with disabilities (Chambers & Forlin, 2020). The following resources are designed to help teachers and therapists consider AT devices their students could use. The AT Specialist or Team for your school, along with the Virginia AT Consideration Guide, provide selection guidance and resources for educators.

- Assistive technology can provide students computer access to enter responses for assessments, such as the VAAP.
 - Student records can record response on computer using:
 - Touch screen monitor
 - Adapted mouse (For example: Joystick, Roller Ball etc.)
 - Adapted keyboards (For example: Bigkeys, student's AAC device plugged into computer, etc.)
 - Switch scanning with a computer interface
 - Single switch with automatic scanning
 - Two step switch scanning: One switch for tab, another switch for enter
 - Student indicates answer using options below and teacher records response on VAAP assessment.
 - Partner assisted scanning:
 - [Project Core Partner-assisted Scanning Brief Overview](#)
 - [Project Core Professional Development Module 5](#)
 - Discusses how to select access methods
 - Partner assisted scanning with a single switch voice output device with pre-recorded message, such as "That is my choice" or "Yes"
 - Scanning app, website, or software programmed with choices that student can access with a switch and a computer interface
 - GoTalkNow, Chooselt Maker, Boardmaker Online/7, simulated scanning with PowerPoint)
 - 3-4 button AAC device, such as TechTalk, with either scanning with a switch or using their hand
 - Pointing- Head Stick, universal cuff, or hand/finger
 - Speech generating device/AAC
 - Tactile objects
 - parts of the actual item or choice, miniature objects, or the actual object
 - Eye gaze frame with 3 choices
 - Pointing at an enlarged choice board with head stick, universal cuff, or hand/finger
 - Braille test and/or braille response options
- TTAC Online and Virginia AT Network Resources:
 - Resource: [Virginia Assistive Technology Guide](#)
 - Resource: [AT Tools in Schools Booklet](#)
 - Resource: [Technology | DO-IT \(washington.edu\)](#) List of Accommodations by Specific Disability
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- Webinar: [101 Assistive Technology Solutions You Can Make in Minutes - Everyday Items with Extraordinary Uses](#) By Therese Wilcom
- Webinar: [Setting the Stage for Success](#) By Dr. Joy Zabala
- Webinar: [What is Assistive Technology?](#) By Dr. Joy Zabala

References

Zabala, J.S. (2020). The SETT framework: A model for selection and use of assistive technology tools and more. in D. Chambers, & C. Forlin, (Eds.). *Assistive technology to support inclusive education* (pp.17-20). Emerald Publishing Limited. doi:10.1108/S1479-363620200000014005