



# *The Big AAC Picture*

EVERYTHING an individual uses to communicate or enhance communication.

Different strategies may be needed for different situations and communication partners.

Strategies and tools may be combined to meet a variety of communication needs.

OPEN ACCESS

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*To make a fliobook, print back to back on 8.5 x 11'. Trim at the dotted line, laminate and bind at the top!*

# Communication! It's about

“The outcome of AAC is not the “tool”,  
it’s about whether an individual has  
access to “the power of  
communication – to interact with  
others, to have an influence on their  
environment, and to participate fully  
in society”

“AAC interventions should  
always be multimodal in nature; that  
is they should utilize the individual’s  
full communication capabilities,  
including any residual speech or  
vocalizations, gestures, signs and  
aided communication.”

(Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013  
- Augmentative Communication:  
Alternative Communication:  
Supporting children and  
adults with complex  
communication needs, 4th  
ed.).

-American Speech Language  
Hearing Association (1991),  
ASHA, 33 (Supplement 5), 9-12.

**There are a variety of naturally-occurring behaviors that may be combined in a multimodal repertoire.**



**Body Language** refers to voluntary or involuntary movements of the body that serve as a form of communication. These movements can include:



whole body movements and/or proxemics  
(like moving towards something desired),



facial expressions, and



gestures (like waving “hi”, head nod, point).



**Verbal Speech** and **Verbal Approximations** (attempts at verbal speech that may be difficult to understand).



**Eye-Gaze** is the act of using one's eyes to direct or redirect the attention of another person (like looking at the door to indicate they want to go out to recess).

## MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION



- Verbalization is the best way to communicate „what you want to say, how you want to say it“ (don't have to rely on what someone has „programmed“ for you to say) in as efficient way as possible (faster than looking for a symbol and touching a location or navigating to another page) ... encourage any and all attempts!

• Verbal approximations are often better understood by very familiar partners or at home.

• Even if difficult to understand, verbalizing is often a communicator's first choice of a strategy.

- Gestures are part of our earliest communication behaviors and remain an effective part of our repertoire throughout our lifespan. Some gestures are universal and are understood even across cultures. Some are „culturally relevant“ (e.g. „dabbing“).

• Body language can sometimes be shaped into a more formal communication gesture (e.g. turning the head to the side can be shaped to a head shake for „no“).

• With emerging communicators, body language can help give clues to a person's „intent“ (putting a head down might mean the child is sad that mom is leaving).

## Some things to think about...

For individuals who struggle to communicate, an AAC system can augment or support multimodal communication strategies. Natural ways of augmenting communication (e.g. body language, eye gaze, vocalizing or verbalizing, proxemics) provide important avenues for expressing thoughts and ideas, but cannot meet the wide range of communication needs that a communicator requires.

## AAC Systems can be broken down into two types:

**Unaided systems** – you do not need anything but your own body to use an unaided system. Manual sign language and eye blink codes are examples of an unaided system.

**Aided systems** – requires some sort of aid (like a tool or a device) to use. This could be a picture book, a spelling board or a speech-generating device.

An aided AAC system is an integrated group of three primary components that we'll break down further:

**Strategies**, which are what WE do as facilitators and partners to support a student in developing or using aided forms of communication; or a novel method a student may use to convey a message;

the **Tools** themselves; and

**Symbols**, or how the system represents thoughts and ideas.



A strategy is a specific way of supporting the use of AAC tools, symbols and/or techniques (like how an individual accesses a system) more effectively for enhancing communication or building foundational skills. Strategies can lead towards more advanced expressive language development or increased proficiency with an access method. Strategies require partner and/communicator understanding and skill.

## **What are some common strategies we should be familiar with and comfortable using with our students?**

**Choice Making** is a *foundational* skill from which we build competence with aided communication strategies! A communicator's ability to make choices increases their options, allows them to control their environment, increases engagement and improves behavior! Present as many options as a communicator can (cognitively, physically and visually) handle. Go beyond choices of "things" (like who they want to sit next to, or what they want to tell mom when they get home). Choices can be presented via objects, environmental cues, pictures/icons, or verbally (with or without a physical or visual cue like touching a finger as you present a choice).

**Modeling/Prompting** are two different things, yet two critical strategies to have in your toolbox and to use! **Modeling** is a "less intrusive" teaching strategy that can help a communicator learn how to communicate in a new or novel way or learn how to use a communication strategy to more actively participate and engage (like showing them how to touch pictures to say "my" "turn" while playing a game). **Prompting** usually follows a hierarchy (most-to-least or least-to-most), and is a systematic way of scaffolding students in acquiring new skills.

**Social Scripts** are a set of sequenced steps that move a communicator through a conversation. They can be plugged into a routine (like greeting my classmates every morning) or used for a more spontaneous interaction (like asking a friend to the movies). Scripts usually involve both the communicator and their partner, and can be used to expose a communicator to using more varied communication functions.

-Turn page for more strategies!

## **STRATEGIES**

allows them to say what they want to say exactly how they want to say it! Even communication systems with more rudimentary spelling skills can make very good use of spelling layouts to communicate (e.g. the first letter of a word) and/or replace speech generating devices). Using these supports is NOT just for proficient spellers. Systems can be no-tech (a spelling board) or high-tech (an alphabet layout in a speech generating device). Spelling is the ultimate strategy for generating novel messages! Spelling-based

available.  
the student access to communication opportunities that might not otherwise be based system (while the student is developing those critical access skills), giving flexibility and scaffolded support that would not be available in a technology for visual, auditory or a combination of both. Using a "smart partner" allows participants in activities without having to independently access a system. Choices can be visual, auditory or a combination of both. This strategy provides conversations using choices presented by a skilled partner. This strategy provides and/or visual impairments to communicate more actively by participating in Partner-Assisted Scanning is a strategy that allows a communicator with physical

ways.  
As you are modeling, the communicator is building a connection between the symbol and the meaning behind that symbol. Modeling the same word in different contexts allows the communicator to learn that words can be used in different contexts using our learned environments or contexts as we can. In this strategy, partners model the words we are targeting for meaningful ways. We can't expect our communicators to learn to use communication symbols without seeing/hearing those symbols used in our learning our communication symbols! We can't expect our communicators to learn to support modeling our communication symbols without seeing/hearing those symbols used in contexts that words can be used in different ways.

## STRATEGIES, continued

**Tools** are the physical object or device used to transmit or receive messages.  
We can break down these tools with the following descriptions:

### *No-Tech or Technology*

They can be no-tech (e.g. a communication book, flipbook, eye gaze board) or technology based (a single message communicator up to a robust speech generating device). No-tech does not necessarily mean less sophisticated, however! Some no-tech systems can be quite robust language systems. No-tech systems can be used in conjunction with technology based systems; they are not mutually exclusive.

### *Static or Dynamic Displays*

For a technology-based system, we can also categorize tools as having either "static" displays (meaning that the symbols on the overlay are fixed or static; the symbols on the display don't change, unless you physically change the overlay) or "dynamic" (meaning that locations on the display can be programmed to link to another page set with a new display of symbols).

### *Digitized or Synthesized Speech*

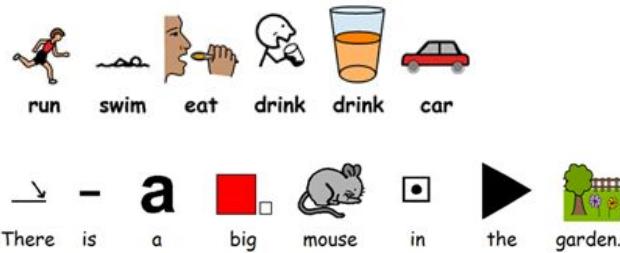
Tools can also have different output features. A tool with "digitized" (recorded) speech stores a real person's actual words, phrases or sentences in the form of digitized sounds. A tool with "synthesized" speech (often referred to as text to speech) produces sounds similar to human speech and is needed to translate spelling into speech output.

### *Dedicated or Integrated*

And finally, we can categorize tools by whether they are a device made specifically for use by individuals with communication needs (a dedicated tool), or a commercially available tool that can be used for multiple purposes, but with the right app or software can be used as a speech-generating device (an integrated tool).

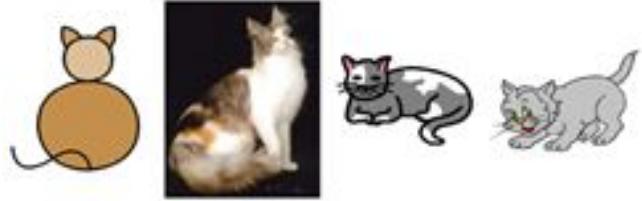


A **symbol** is how a word or concept or message is “represented” so that a communicator can select it in order to send a message to his or her partner. Symbols can be tactile (like objects or parts of objects), visual (like a picture, drawing, letter or word) or auditory representations of concepts or ideas.

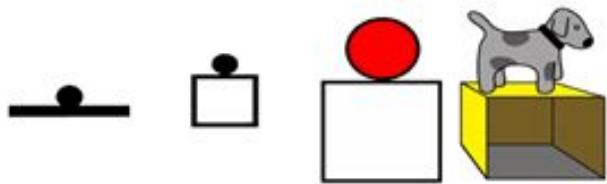


Symbols can be sequenced to build sentences from separate parts.

Not all symbols are alike! Some are what we call “representational” (or more concrete). They look like what they are trying to convey. Sometimes these are referred to as “picture producers”. For example, all of these are symbols for “cat”.



But not all words or ideas are so easy to represent. Some are more “abstract” (symbols that will require some explanation, teaching, or modeling in order for them to be understood and used by the communicator). These are sometimes referred to as “non-picture producers”. For example, all of these are symbols for “on”.





## Building Tiered Supports



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