

AAC Glossary of Terms

AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication): “an area of clinical practice that attempts to compensate (either temporarily or permanently) for the impairment and disability patterns of individuals with severe expressive communication disorders (i.e., those characterized by severe impairments in speech-language, reading, and writing). AAC can involve external aids (books, technology) or natural communication, such as facial expression, body posture, gesture, or sign language. The best form or forms of communication are determined by the needs of the individual with disabilities and their communication partners.”

As defined by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

No-Tech AAC: Communication aids which do not require anything outside of the user’s body (e.g., sign language).

Low-Tech AAC: Simple communication aids which do not need batteries or electronics consisting of letters, words, phrases, pictures and/or symbols on a board or in a book, which may be accessed in multiple ways including direct pointing, head or mouth stick, light pointer, or signaling confirmation as a communication partner scans through the possible options.

Mid-Tech AAC: Battery operated or “simple” electronic devices requiring limited advancements in technology (e.g., recorded voice output buttons such as Big Mack or Step-by-Step and static display paper overlay devices such as Go Talk and QuickTalker).

High-Tech AAC: Dynamic display devices which contain page sets with letters, words, phrases, pictures, and/or symbols that the communicator navigates between to express messages. High-tech devices vary in size and weight, as well as how the user can access messages, including the use of direct selection of a screen or keyboard with a body part, pointer, or eye gaze, adapted mice or joysticks, or indirect selection using switches and scanning. High-tech systems can be divided into dedicated devices used solely for the purpose of communication and AAC, and non-dedicated devices, such as tablets, which are used as a communication tool, but which can also be used for other functions.

Aided Language Stimulation: A communication teaching strategy in which the communication partner points to picture symbols on a communication display as they interact with an individual verbally. Through this modeling process the meaning of symbols and the concept of using pictures as a form of expressive communication is modeled and taught to the individual.

Alpha Assisted Speech: A strategy in which a communicator uses a letter board to point to the first letter of each word as they speak. This strategy works in two ways to: (1) slow the communicator down as he locates the letters on the board corresponding to the first letter of each word, and (2) gives the listener prompts about what the word starts with so they can better understand the spoken words.

Alternative Mouse: Use of direct selection with an external device such as a trackpad, trackball, or joystick frequently used when an individual has difficulty with direct pointing on a touchscreen. Dwell settings are often used in conjunction with alternative mouse options as an alternative to manual selection (mouse click).

Auditory Cues: Options or prompts that are presented auditorily either by a communication partner or a communication device.

Auditory Fishing: A direct selection method that allows the user to browse through the items on the display by touching locations and listening to auditory cues, ideally at a reduced volume or in a private ear piece. When the desired item is located, a second activation of the button will result in expression of the full message at conversational level.

Auditory Scanning: An alternative access technique in which a communication partner or a device with a synthetic voice announces auditory cues for vocabulary/messages, one at a time, until the AAC user hears what he or she wants to say and selects the item, typically using some type of switch.

Communication Board/Book: Page(s) of symbols, usually organized by topics relevant to the age, language ability and interest of the AAC user. Depending on the age, cognitive and physical abilities of the user, the board/book may have from one to many symbols on each page.

Debounce Setting: An access setting which defines a time period after a successful switch hit has occurred during which subsequent switch hits are ignored. This option is useful for users who have trouble moving away from the switch after activating it, resulting in unintended selections.

Dedicated Device / Durable Medical Equipment: Devices developed solely for the purpose of communication and AAC and conform to specifications from Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for payment through medical insurance funding sources.

Direct Select: Access method which includes pointing with a body part such as a finger, hand, or toe, or through the use of a pointing device such as a stylus, mouse, beam of light, headstick, or mouthstick.

Dwell Setting: An access setting which controls the amount of time the user must keep their finger, selection tool (e.g., stylus), or maintains eye gaze on the button area before a selection is recognized. As the dwell timer counts down some devices present a visual cue or feedback to help the user recognize when the selection is accepted and the message will be spoken.

Dynamic Display: A feature within high-tech AAC devices that allows activation of a particular item or button on the screen, resulting in linking to a new page of vocabulary which is either relevant to a particular topic (e.g., pages of foods, drinks, toys) or continues a sentence structure (e.g., "I want" links to options for "to eat," "to drink," "to play").

Enhanced Natural Gestures (ENG): Intentional behaviors that already exist in a communicator's motor repertoire or can be easily taught based on existing motor skills, which do not require physical contact with objects. Modeling and shaping strategies are used to teach the individual that use of this gesture has a specific communicative intent. For example, rocking body back and forth is shaped to request

continuation of swinging; bringing a hand to mouth indicates desire for food or drink. Instruction in use of ENGs requires consistent reinforcement of the link between the gesture and its meaning.

Eye Control Access (high tech): A direct selection access method in which a camera reads the reflection of light from the user's eyes to determine where the individual is looking on the screen. The camera is calibrated to the individual user's eye gaze toward multiple locations on the screen to optimize their accuracy in selecting letters, vocabulary, or messages. Individual selections of this content are made through dwelling on a location, blinking, or activating a switch when the cursor is located on the preferred location on the screen.

Eye Gaze (low tech): Access method in which the communicator holds their gaze on an item for a sustained time to select that item. This can be done using objects and/or low-tech formats such as communication books and boards that are held up by a communication partner who observes where the communicator is looking to confirm the selections.

Feature Matching: A collaborative process which involves using criterion-based assessment strategies to gather relevant information about a client's communication and sensorimotor abilities and applying AAC expertise to match the appropriate array of AAC options that offer features relevant for meeting the person's needs and skills.

Guided Access: An iOS feature which allows for temporarily disabling the hardware buttons (i.e., home button) of an iPad or iPhone and controlling which app features are available, until a password is entered. Often used to "lock" a user into a communication app to maintain focus and reduce distraction from other applications on the device.

Head Mouse: An access method in which an optical sensor tracks the movement of a small disposable target worn by the user (typically on their forehead or glasses) which moves the mouse pointer on the screen in direct proportion to the user's head movements. This method allows for hands-free access to speech generating devices as well as computer functions.

Keyguard: A keyguard is a sheet of Plexiglas or other thin plastic that lays over the top of a communication display, and has holes cut out over the locations of different buttons on the display. This allows the user to slide their hands across the screen and insert fingers into the particular spaces, helping to prevent accidental activation and reduce unintended selections.

Message Window: Area on the display of a speech generating device in which the user formulates their message using selection of phrases, words, or spelling and can then activate the window to express their full message at once.

Mounting Equipment (Universal Arm, Table, Wheelchair, Floor): Hardware which securely and consistently positions AAC equipment so that the user is able to access it reliably in a variety of positions and environments and during the different tasks they need to perform. It also ensures that the device is safe and less likely to be dropped or knocked off a table or wheelchair tray.

Multimodal Communication: Use of a combination of different communication strategies which may include speech, non-linguistic strategies (gestures, pointing, facial expression), sign language, and/or

other AAC techniques, that allow the communicator flexibility to switch between or combine multiple strategies to most effectively and efficiently communicate across situations.

Navigation: A term used to define the user's ability to move between pages of a communication book or device in search of desired vocabulary or messages.

Off-the-Shelf Technology: Software or hardware products that are ready-made and available for sale to the general public. This type of technology is becoming more widely utilized as a platform for communication tools.

Page Set: A group of communication pages on a low- or high-tech AAC device which organizes language in categorical, contextual, or linguistic fashion and allows for the user to efficiently access a breadth of vocabulary and messages to communicate about a variety of topics.

Partner Assisted Scanning: A method of communication involving no technology that an individual who is non-verbal can use to communicate messages with a partner. The partner provides choices to the person who is non-speaking and that person indicates his choice with a predetermined signal when he hears (or sees) the desired option. The predetermined signal can be a vocal sound, body movement, or manual sign. Signals that are frequently taught include vocalizing "ya," nodding, raising an arm, touching the communication partner's hand, or looking directly at the partner. This strategy is sometimes used with a Partner Assisted Scanning Board, which includes categories of frequently discussed topics, and "best guesses" at messages within each topic that are presented to the communicator systematically.

Release Time Setting: An access setting which helps prevent accidental double button activations with a set amount of time during which the user must stop activating the screen before another button press will be accepted.

Scanning: An access method used by individuals who are not able to directly select items on a communication display. Scanning involves a systematic pattern which highlights each item on the device and the user selects their desired message using a switch activation. Scan patterns include linear, row-column, or group options. Items are highlighted via auditory and/or visual cues to support the communicator in locating and selecting desired messages.

Auto / 1-Switch: A switch activation starts the sequence, which then proceeds automatically within a preset amount of time (scan speed). When the desired selection is highlighted a subsequent switch activation selects that choice.

Step / 2-Switch: One switch is used to advance, or step through, the scan pattern. When the desired selection is reached, the second switch is activated to select that choice.

Sign Language: Manual hand shapes and gestures which represent letters, words, or phrases as a means to communicate with others, which can include conventional, approximated, and/or invented signs.

Single/Sequential Message Communicator: A mid-tech AAC option which allows for recorded messages to be expressed via a button push to attract attention, make requests, or express other messages. Single message communicators allow for repetition of the same recording while sequential message

communicators allow for recording sequenced messages such as lines of a song or book, news from the week or weekend, and telling a joke. These introductory tools teach the power of communication and participation and build a foundation for advancing AAC and communication skills.

Speech Generating Device (SGD): Electronic devices that allow the user to select messages to be spoken aloud, thereby enhancing the communication of individuals who are unable to use natural speech or other strategies to meet all of their communication needs.

Speech Output: Method by which a mid- or high-tech AAC device expresses a given message. Types of speech output include (1) *recorded* human voice that is played back by the device; (2) *digitized*, which is recorded voice that is electronically modified to more closely represent the communicator's natural voice; and (3) *synthesized* computer-generated voices which allow for personalized voice options.

Stylus: A small tool that is used to assist in providing more precision when using touchscreens on AAC devices. There are many forms of styluses, including bendable, telescoping, large diameter, and triangular.

Switch: An access tool which enables individuals with limited movement, strength, and/or endurance to operate AAC equipment. Switches come in a variety of options to allow the person to use their most easily generated movement or signal to activate the device (e.g., proximity, grip, voice).

Switch Interface Box: A device which connects a switch to a computer or tablet via USB or Bluetooth connection and allows the switch to control the communication software and/or other functions.

Symbol Set: AAC devices use photos, line-drawn images, or text to represent words or concepts. Different vendors have created sets of these symbols which provide consistent visual supports to aid in discrimination and selection of words or messages on a communication device (e.g., PCS/Boardmaker, SymbolStix).

Visual Feedback: Can include outline, highlight, zoom, color, cursor style, font, border, and background settings which provide support for visual attention and focus, as well as cues related to discrimination, localization, and selection of particular items on a communication display.

Visual Scene Display: A communication display featuring a full screen picture or photograph, that represents a familiar context or place. Individual elements such as people, actions, and objects are programmed with "hot spots" that activate a message or linking page when that item is selected (e.g., touching the fridge in a picture of a kitchen might activate voice output saying "I'm hungry" or may link to a page of food options).

Visual Supports: Can include photographs, drawings, objects, written words, or lists which provide supports for attention and focus, understanding of complex concepts, foreshadowing routines, sequences, or schedules, and successful transitions.

Word Prediction: A strategy in which an AAC device predicts the word or phrase being written by the user. The user can then select the correct prediction without needing to write the full word. Words are predicted based on their frequency in language, association with other words, past choices of the user, or grammatical structure.