Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Vocabulary Types
When programming an augmentative/ alternative communication (AAC) device or creating a communication board, it is important to distinguish between different types of vocabulary. By carefully planning or programming a device, parents and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) enable children to produce a variety of meaningful phrases and sentences.

Vocabulary Types
Core Vocabulary: Core vocabulary refers to words that speakers use frequently across multiple settings, such as the park, school, and home. These high-frequency words bridge topics and environments, and children can easily combine them to form meaningful phrases and sentences. Core vocabulary words are typically pronouns, verbs, and demonstratives, such as *it, go, want, eat, I, this,* and *no*.

Fringe Vocabulary: Fringe vocabulary refers to a specific set of low- frequency vocabulary words that are specific to a particular person or activity. Fringe vocabulary words are typically nouns. Examples of fringe vocabulary words include *bat, home run, base,* and *pitcher.* Again, these words are highly specific to a single activity and are generally only useful when talking about baseball.

Why does it matter?
Because a single page on a device or board contains a limited amount of space, SLPs and parents must carefully choose vocabulary.

A student can use core vocabulary words to talk about a variety of topics for different purposes. For example, a student may have *no, you, I, want, go,* and *more* programmed on his device. How many messages can this student make? The student can combine words to make requests, such as "I want more," or "I want it." The student may also combine words to make rejections, such as *"No more."* Finally, a student can attempt to make directives, like *"You go."*

The context of a core vocabulary word determines the meaning of the message. If a student says *"I want to go"* in the context of a board game, he is indicating that he would like a turn to play. The same message in the context of a conversation regarding the grocery store indicates that the student physically wants to go to the store. In the context of a non- preferred activity, a student might use the same phrase to indicate that he is ready to leave.

A communication device/board that contains mostly fringe vocabulary may include words such as *paper, pencil, crayon,* and *glue.* How many messages can this student produce? This vocabulary set severely limits the child to making one-word requests and labeling objects. When programming an AAC device or creating a communication board, it is important to find a balance between flexible core vocabulary words and appropriate fringe vocabulary words. By meaningfully and carefully selecting both core and fringe words for a device or board, parents and SLPs open the door to strong communication skills.

Keep in Mind Communication Boards Should:

Have an emphasis on core vocabulary. Core vocabulary needs to be emphasized in individual communication systems. Core words are the most flexible and can meet someone's communication needs most of the time.

Have inclusion of fringe vocabulary. Fringe vocabulary is also important and should join core vocabulary for a more total or comprehensive communication system.

Keep core vocabulary in static positions- A principle of core vocabulary learning is that the words stay in a consistent position across communication tools and even when new words are added (long-term planning is important here know where the first 100 words will go, even if you are starting with 12).

Add fringe vocabulary in a static organizational/placement system- Create a core to fringe word systematic layout, so AAC users (and facilitators) know where to locate the consistent core words and know where the framework for the fringe vocabulary will be located.

It is important to remember:
Core vocabulary needs to be taught- Use core vocabulary teaching strategies. These words are often abstract and might be harder to learn than more concrete ones and therefore need many, many communication opportunities for the learner to practice using them in authentic situations.

With core word vocabulary communication boards, "Ease of use" at first is not predictor of success. Teaching and practice are necessary when learning a new communication system. Make sure true teaching and practice happen before testing and making a decision as to whether or not an AAC learner can be successful. Think of it like learning a new language, it is going to take time! Keep in mind that the AAC user should be fully immersed in their AAC language. Do people speak AAC to the AAC learner all the time? Are there opportunities for them to practice speaking back (even if their response is not perfect)? Do they have access to a full range of that language at all times? The answers to all of these questions do not have to be "yes", but if not yes, then the "no's" need to be considered when deciding the level of learning and communication success.

Create many communication opportunities– Make sure there are many opportunities to USE the communication system for a variety of communication functions/reasons: requesting, commenting, protesting, chatting, conversation, and more.

Use Aided Language Input (ALI) and other specific teaching strategies- Use AAC device to model AAC language.

Provide specific feedback to AAC communication.

Now We're Talkin'
Home Activities

Nurture your child's confidence with their device at home by practicing skills and building on the communication activities they're learning in speech therapy. Support your child in sharing their voice at home by using the following tips to build on skills they are working on with their speech-language pathologist.

Model

Touch the symbol yourself during these activities to demonstrate to your child where it is and how to use it. Try using new symbols while you are talking to show them how additional symbols can be used. For example, when reading the word "look" in a book, press "look" on the device simultaneously so that your child can see different symbols being used. You can also model using the device during parallel play. If your child is playing with cars, say and select the symbols for "go" and "stop" to describe how you and your child are playing with the cars.

Expand

If your child communicates, "Help," on the device, provide assistance to acknowledge their successful communication with the device. Then it is helpful to use the device to say, "Thank you for telling me, 'I need help,'" and select all of the symbols to show the expanded sentence.

Guide

When getting started using the communication device, guidance and prompting may be needed. This allows your child to be successful instantly, and learn that communication can be quick and easy by selecting the desired symbols to share their messages. For example, you might start by pointing to a desired symbol within an activity and verbally encouraging your child to select that word or phrase. From there, support is decreased as your child learns where the previously prompted messages are and gains confidence using the device.

Repeat

Children learn a language by immersing themselves and hearing constant examples of how words are said and used. Children are not expected to start speaking single words until they have heard their language being modeled for an entire year. Using the device as you repeatedly say and model messages on the device will support your child in using the device with increased independence as quickly as possible!

If your child seems overwhelmed or distracted by the number of words/phrases available on the screen, contact their speech therapist. They may consider hiding symbols on the page to better support your child's success!
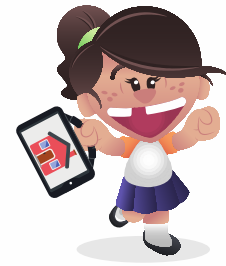
1.0 Play

Now We're Talkin'
Home Activities

Child Name: _____

Recommended Cues: _____

(e.g. Model, Gesture/point, Verbal, Independent)

To be a successful communicator, your child should practice using their speech-generating device at home. Check off the list of activities below to help your child become familiar and comfortable with communicating in various situations. After that, get creative and make note of unique activities that are more specialized to your child's goals, needs and wants!

Activity ideas:

Note other activities and messages:

☐ **Requesting**
Support your child in selecting the activity by using their device to say, "want that," or selecting the activity they would like to play.

_____
_____
_____

☐ **Commenting**
Choose a sport or activity your child prefers. Support them in sharing how they feel while playing by using the communication device to say, "I like that," or "more."

_____
_____
_____

☐ **Questioning**
Play hide-and-seek, and your child can use their device to ask, "where?" as they are searching for a friend. Model, "look!" and point them in the direction of their friend.

_____
_____
_____

☐ **Rejecting**
Choose a sport or activity your child does not prefer, and encourage them to use their device to let you know if they "don't like" it.

_____
_____
_____

☐ **Directing**
Before your child starts playing on the slide or swing, say, "ready, set…" Leave a pause to encourage your child to reply, "go!" on their device before playing.

_____
_____
_____

Talk To Me Technologies

_____

☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced   ☐ Core ☐ Phrase

Data Tracking

Check the boxes that apply to the lesson plan that was practiced. Make note of the target word(s) as well as the cues provided to support the child's communication: (M)odeling, (P)oint/gesture, (V)erbal or (I)ndependent cues.

Date	Target Word(s)	Cue	Notes

Resources

PrAACtical AAC
https://praacticalaac.org/strategy/join-together-core-fringe-vocabulary/

Super Duper
https://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/405_CoreVocabulary.pdf

Now We're Talking Technologies
https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0770/8269/files/lessonplan_packet_play.pdf?v=1572355911