

# Documenting Student Communication & Language Progress Using AAC & Core Vocabulary in the Classroom

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It is essential to collect and document student progress when implementing any type of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) communication and language program. The focus of documentation related to the use of *AAC and core vocabulary in a classroom* is typically on communication and language development. It is not focused on academic achievement or behavioral changes. While positive outcomes in these areas were noted and documented, all data collected in these areas were noted on the student's IEP.

## **How to collect data?**

There are many ways to collect data on a student's AAC communication and language progress. For beginning communicators, observational checklists are often used to document various communication and language skills. As expressive language emerges, a traditional means to monitor language progress is through language sample analysis. Another way to measure language acquisition is through testing of targeted language skills, such as vocabulary acquisition.

Collecting data in natural settings can be very challenging. Teachers are trying to manage the students, materials, and take data. It may require someone, other than the teacher interacting with the student(s), to collect the data, especially if the interaction is NOT being videotaped or the teacher or assistant is interacting with a group of students.

## **When to collect data?**

It is commonly recommended to collect data at the start of any intervention program. For students in schools, it is recommended that data be collected during each progress/report card period during the school year.

## **What kind of documentation should be used?**

During the development of the Pixon Project Kit, a student's abilities and progress was documented by observing student performance and collecting language samples. These samples were analyzed based on a variety of parameters. Checklists are also provided for documenting student responses to modeling and for tracking the use of the core and extended vocabulary words from the 50-location Pixon core board and the wall chart from the Pixon Project Kit.

This approach was modified as more and more classrooms adopted an AAC core vocabulary classroom approach. To meet the needs of the classroom teams, a document entitled the Student AAC Profile & Portfolio was developed. This document contains the following information:

1. Identifying information about the student (e.g., name, grade, teacher, etc.)
2. A description of the classroom communication board used for modeling and the other classroom visual/academic support materials developed (e.g., wall chart, environmental engineering materials, visual schedules, AAC symbolized curriculum)
3. A copy and/or description of the student's personal AAC system(s)
4. The student's Communication Profile (e.g., the forms in this document), including a section for **Communication Partner** behaviors.
5. Copies of any other communication assessment protocols used, (e.g., Communication Matrix, AAC Profile: A Continuum of Learning, Functional Communication Assessment)
6. Samples of academic work, including written work produced using the target core vocabulary
7. Transcripts of language samples, when appropriate and available
8. Other important print-based or audio/visual-based examples of the student's communication output (e.g., a flash drive with video samples of student behavior and interaction with others).

It is recommended that the Student AAC Profile & Portfolio be reviewed. If appropriate for your needs, compile a Student AAC Profile & Portfolio on each student enrolled in your core vocabulary classroom. The Portfolio section should include a sample of the student's communication system, written work developed using the AAC system, and any other important examples of the student's communication output.

The Student AAC Profile & Portfolio is only one way to document a student's AAC system and his/her levels of performance. There are many ways for teachers to document student progress. Your local school district, regional center, or school program needs to develop and implement documentation strategies that work for you.

Whatever strategies or forms used to collect and document outcomes, it is recommended that you document a student's communication and language skills in the following 4 areas:

1. Operational Competence – Document the student's ability to physically use the AAC system, navigate through the system, transport the system, etc.
2. Linguistic Competence – Document the student's speech and language abilities, including development and use of any speech (Phonology), reasons for communicating (Pragmatics), acquisition and use of vocabulary (Semantics), word combinations and sentence development (Syntax), use of word endings (Morphology) and interaction with others using the AAC system (Discourse).
3. Social Competence – Document how the student uses the AAC system during interaction with others. This is an expansion of a student's Discourse skills, and might

included his/her ability to purposefully initiate communication, respond appropriately to others, maintain interaction, set topics, and engage in group conversations.

4. Strategic Competence – Document how the student strategizes in order to be more effective. This might include his/her ability to use different communication modalities in different situations, requests addition of more vocabulary on his/her AAC system, uses repair strategies when communication breaks down, and uses clues (such as descriptive strategies) to communicate an idea when the word is not available in the AAC system.