

Augmentative Communication Recommended Practices  
From Goals to Growth: The Essential Elements of an AAC System

By Maureen Nevers, M.S. CCC-SLP

Dear Educational Team Member,

This document was created to share a process for how you might organize and prioritize information related to an Augmentative Communication (AAC) system. The structure and content have evolved out of my work with hundreds of educational teams over the last two decades, as well as my ongoing professional development activities.

Following my 5 STEPS profile, each of the five sections below represents one part of an educational system:

- Targets
- Teaching and Tasks
- Tools,
- Testing, and
- Team.

Using this structure, five essential AAC practices have been identified in each area. These practices were selected based on their strong contributions to a successful AAC system and are supported by the current AAC literature.

While these are not the only elements necessary for a successful AAC system, a system without many of these elements would not likely achieve meaningful communication outcomes. Hopefully this collection will spark conversations, inspire new ideas, and help to guide you in the selection of appropriate practices to support the individuals you live and/or work with who need AAC support.

Sincerely,  
Maureen Nevers, M.S. CCC-SLP

<b>Targets</b>	<b>Student's learning outcomes, goals</b>
1. initiation	Student frequently acts on their environment in physical ways – move, touch, reach, push, swipe, etc. – to produce specific actions and reactions.
2. range of functions	Student communicates for a variety of purposes; is able to express a range of language functions
3. expanding message length	Student is working to increase the average length of their messages (expressed via symbols, gestures, signs, vocalizations) e.g. child at a single word level is working towards more two-word phrases
4. broad vocabulary	The student's repertoire of words includes a range of parts of speech, and types of words (e.g. general, more specific, very specific); student has a good breadth and depth of vocabulary
5. broad applications	Student is expanding the communication environments – new situations, new people, new locations, new activities...

<b>Teaching</b>	<b>Instructional approaches; partner's role</b>
1. modeling	Partners incorporate the use of the communication system into the daily routines, demonstrating how the support can be used without any expectation of use by the student
2. non-directive language	Partners use statements, comments and observations as opposed to questions and directives.
3. opportunities	Student has reasons, time and opportunity to communicate throughout the day
4. establish routines	Partners establish routines and systems related to activities to improve consistency and predictability when possible.
5. partner role	Partners support communication by inserting expectant pauses, incorporating natural cues, responding logically to communication attempts etc.

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Activities</b>
1. age-respectful	Use materials that are appropriate in form and content for the student's age-matched peers.
2. engagement	Incorporate features and practices that promote individual engagement
3. curriculum connections	Include connections to the rich and interesting topics, materials, and activities associated with the grade-level general education curriculum
4. appropriate challenge	Provide materials and activities that are at an appropriate level of challenge –“frustration-free with feedback”
5. variety	Broad repertoire of activities which Incorporate “repetition with variety” – where the activity and materials are changed moderately so that some parts are novel and some stay the same

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Communication materials; format and content</b>
1. receptive supports	Specific supports are used to aid in understanding, remembering, and using information
2. different parts of speech	Expressive communication tools include different parts of speech; supports communicating for a range of functions/purposes such as: academic participation, expressing wants/needs, sharing information, and participating in social interactions.
3. sufficient vocabulary quantity	Expressive tools include a sufficient quantity of vocabulary overall, utilizing alternative access methods as needed to maximize the available targets
4. range of vocabulary format	Expressive tools include vocabulary in a variety of formats, such as: letters, single words, and phrases
5. organized	Communication tools are organized in clear, systematic, format that promotes learning of linguistic and motor patterns

<b>Testing</b>	<b>Methods of progress monitoring</b>
1. communication assessments	Appropriate speech, language, and communication assessments have been used to identify accurate present abilities and appropriate intervention targets
2. program checks	Instructional programs are monitored to ensure they are being implemented as intended.
3. fair testing	Valid and reliable student responses are documented, along with those that are not, so that the student is evaluated using appropriate means
4. school assessments	Student is provided an opportunity to participate in classroom and state-wide assessments with appropriate adjustments to ensure they are represented in the accountability system
5. data collection	The team uses an effective progress monitoring system, incorporating a range data collection formats, and identifying the methods of analyzing and applying the information

<b>Team</b>	<b>Resources for team to implement program elements</b>
1. planning time	The team participates in regular planning sessions to achieve the program expectations
2. documentation	The student's educational program elements are clearly documented and shared to ensure program quality and compliance
3. team members	Team members have the knowledge, skill and disposition necessary to provide an appropriate educational experience.
4. IEP	The student's IEP is complete, accurate, and concise, providing a logical progression from present levels to accommodations to services and goals.
5. IEP goals	The IEP goals are limited to prioritize the most important learning in the

next year, integrate foundational and academic skills, and are discipline-free.