



# 54 TIPS AND TRICKS FOR IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE AND AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM



**By Lesley Gallagher & Amy Litton**  
**Speech Pathologists, ILC Tech**

© Independent Living Centre WA 2014



# '54 Top Tips and Tricks for implementing an AAC device into your classroom'

---

This resource has been developed by the Independent Living Centre (ILC) WA, as part of a Non-Government Centre Supports (NGCS) funded project "Intensive AAC support in schools". This project ran over the 2014 school year providing one full day of Speech Pathology support in the classroom for a term to students using speech generating devices in a mainstream school setting.

## **Message from the Authors**

Welcome to our top tips on supporting successful AAC implementation in your classrooms! We're Lesley and Amy, both Speech Pathologists at the Independent Living Centre of WA (ILC). The ILC provides a range of services that enable Western Australians of all ages and abilities to live more independent and fulfilling lives.

As staff in the Technology Team at the ILC, we completed a project working in schools, providing intensive support to students using speech generating devices and their communication partners. As part of this project, we've put together a few of our tips and tricks about implementing communication devices in school that we, and the schools have found useful for successful device use in the education setting. This resource is designed for people working in and with schools.

We've included our tips on how to create opportunities, strategies and resources you might use, ideas of games you could play and how to get peers involved. You'll see real-life quotes from staff working in education about how this intervention and these strategies have supported them using high tech AAC in their classrooms. There is certainly not a one size fits all approach to AAC, but we hope you'll find some of these tips and tricks valuable in your work with students using AAC.

## **Good Luck!**



**Lesley Gallagher**

*"Our boy has just skyrocketed with confidence and everything, and engagement in socialising with his peers has been enormous. He had assembly today and he was standing up there with his Proloquo2Go to do his part of the assembly, which before, he would've just stood there because he had no voice"*

*-Classroom Teacher*



**Amy Litton**

## Contents

<b>Quick Glossary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Five Technical Tips .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Make the device accessible! .....	5
Have a charger at school.....	5
Dedicate your device .....	5
Protect your device .....	5
Have a low tech system handy .....	5
<b>Five Tips on Working Together - Making a Partnership .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Spend time getting to know each other .....	6
Form goals together for school.....	6
Set small goals when working towards the big ones – ‘less is more’ .....	6
Think about your perceptions and expectations – are they high enough? .....	7
<b>Seven Tips on Preparation.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Talk about concerns.....	8
Plan to make it successful .....	8
Know the device.....	8
Work at AAC Language level of the student .....	8
Think about language functions.....	8
Scripting .....	9
You need something to talk about.....	9
<b>Fourteen Tips on Strategies for Supporting AAC Implementation .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Expect use of the device .....	10
Tune into the device, interpret and respond.....	10
Modelling .....	10
Expand Language - Match and stretch! .....	11
Create opportunities.....	12
Routines .....	12
WAAAAAAAAAAAAAIIIT!.....	12
Prompting .....	13
Think about the questions asked .....	13
Think about questions even more .....	13
Go with the AAC user’s interest! .....	14
<b>Twelve Tips on Resources for Implementation .....</b>	<b>15</b>

Tar Heel Reader.....	15
Use games you already have .....	15
AAC Language Lab.....	15
Get outdoors.....	16
Use everyday technology.....	16
Barrier games.....	17
Instruction and Message Giver .....	17
Shared reading.....	17
Singing.....	17
Numeracy.....	18
Literacy.....	18
Describing activities .....	18
Communication passports and about me books .....	19
<b>Getting Peers Involved .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Run a peer communication lesson.....	20
Reading roster.....	20
Get directing .....	21
Interviews, Surveys and Presentations.....	21
Group Work .....	22
News time!.....	22
Joke time!.....	22
<b>Three Survival Techniques!.....</b>	<b>23</b>
It doesn't matter if you don't know everything (phew!) .....	23
Know your support systems (and the name of the device!).....	23
Evaluate and celebrate .....	23
Contact.....	25
Acknowledgements.....	25



## Quick Glossary

### AAC – Alternative and Augmentative Communication

Another system such as a device or paper-based board with symbols that a student uses to communicate

### Modelling

You use the device too! Teach and show the student how they can use the device by talking with the device too. To find out more about modelling see [Positive AACtion](#) by Rocky Bay

### Aided Language Stimulation (ALS) / Aided Language Input

These terms are often used to describe modelling in the world of AAC. Learning AAC is a bit like learning another language we know we have to be immersed in a language to learn it. When we do ALS we are modelling the use of the symbols to say real things in real situations, what to say, how to navigate and operate the device.

### Device

Through this resource device refers to an individual high tech communication device.

### High Tech

Refers to an electronic AAC system with voice output

### Low Tech

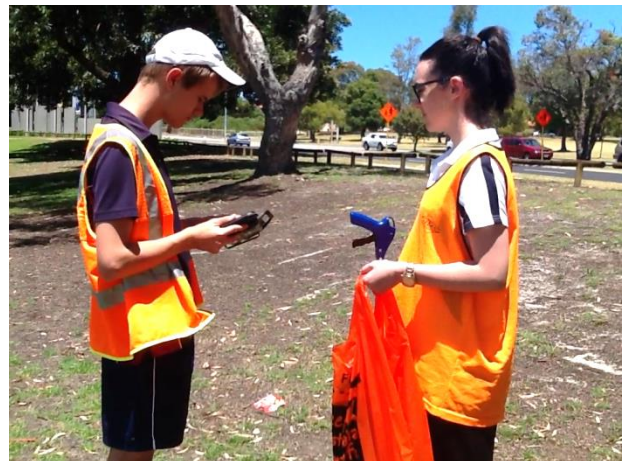
Refers to a paper AAC system designed for communication

### Core Vocabulary/Words

The words we use every day in lots of different situations and activities.

### Fringe Vocabulary/Words

The words specific to us and particular situations and activities (these tend to be nouns)



## Five Technical Tips

**A few quick and easy tips to help prevent technical difficulties standing in the way of successful communication.**

### Make the device accessible!

Make sure the student has access to the device at all times. If the student can't reach it or see it, they won't be able to use it. Look into cases, straps, stands to make sure the device can be taken everywhere.

*"He was bringing his device to school before and it would stay in his bag all day. Nobody was getting him to get it out. And now, if he hasn't got it, it's like he's missing an elbow or missing an arm".*



### Have a charger at school

Communication devices run out of charge and the more you use it the sooner the battery will run low. Bring a charger to school in the students' school bag, or if possible, keep a spare one at school.

### Dedicate your device

If you can, give your device one purpose: For communication. If you're playing games and watching videos on your device it loses its power as a communication tool. If you're using an iPad as a communication tool, you can lock it to your communication app using guided access. For tips on how to apply guided access on an iPad you can go to the [ILC website](#).

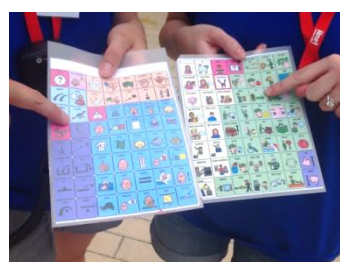
*"The child had the iPad, but wasn't using Proloquo2Go. So there were games installed and there were YouTube things and whatever...and if it's for communication as soon as you put games on it that's kind of lost"*

### Protect your device

Give the device a protective and/or waterproof cover. You want the student to be able to take their device everywhere they go (except perhaps the swimming pool!)

### Have a low tech system handy

Technology breaks! When this happens (and it probably will at some point!) the student will need a back-up. This can be done by making low tech (paper based) communication aids. Take screen shots of page sets, or make up communication boards. That way the student will still have a voice during technical hiccups.



## Five Tips on Working Together - Making a Partnership

**When we think about the team around the student using a communication device – there are a lot of us! We all come to the party to do our bit to support the student, but often we may have different priorities and responsibilities.**

*“They want to give you a program. And I’m trying to get them to understand that I’m there to run an Educational program”*

*“We have a separate set of goals that we have to achieve with the children as Educators. So their goals need to fit in with ours and work with ours, not take over ours”*

**Here are a few tips that may make working together more successful.**

### Spend time getting to know each other

Before talking about goals, or working on specific things for the student, get to know each other. Get to know the school environment and the student in that setting. Talk about and observe difficulties that student has in the classroom, times you think would be great for them to be able to say something and participate more. Share thoughts and ideas. Share your fears about using the device and ask lots of questions. When you come to talk about goals you’ll be on the same page and have the same information and know what’s realistic, practical and important for the student in the school setting.

*“I was quite resistant. I was a little bit resistant to have this in my room to start with because I thought - Oh, you know, it’s a bit of a threat. It’s another person coming in. Are they gonna make a judgement about what’s going on? ...it was a real mix. But I think the personalities of the stakeholders are really important.”*

### Form goals together for school

Often family/therapy and school goals may be similar, but the way the goals are worded and how you will work towards achieving them may be different. If goals are to be achieved in a school setting they have to be formed by the group of people working with the student and/or fit in with the child’s Individualised Education Plan. Schools are routine based and goals will have more chance at being achieved if they fit in with that routine.

*“It was about what we were doing. It was like “What are you doing in your classroom today?” “It wasn’t an extra thing. It was normal work. It actually helped”*

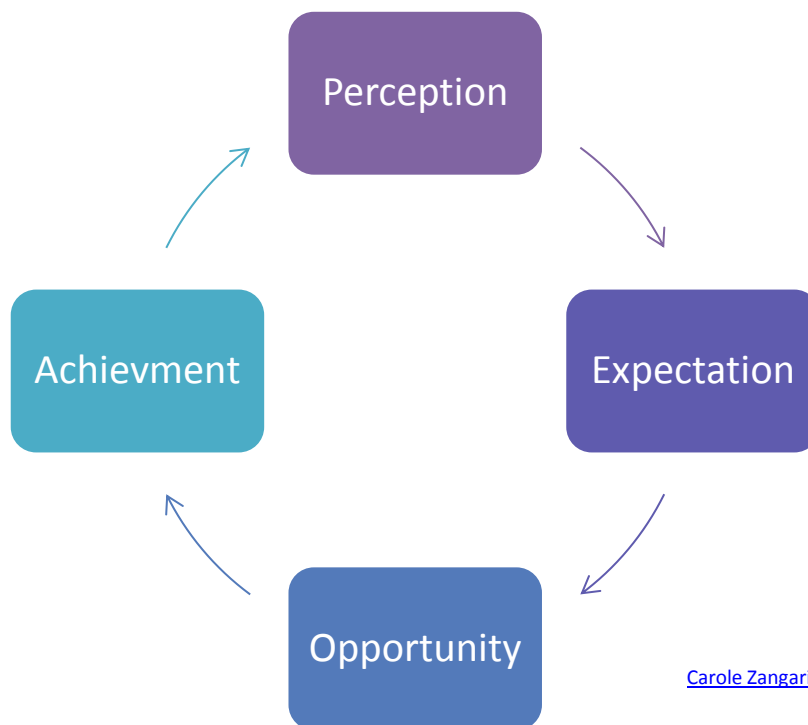
### Set small goals when working towards the big ones – ‘less is more’

Schools are really busy. There is a lot to fit in during the day. Agreeing on 1-2 things to work on per visit in working towards the bigger goals (e.g. using the device to say ‘good morning’ to the teacher as part of a bigger social goal) is much easier than 10 things to work on. If we agree on small goals, we’re more likely to be able to focus on them and ultimately achieve them.



## Think about your perceptions and expectations – are they high enough?

What are you assuming about the student? How do we know where students should start and what to expect from them? Our perception of a student and their abilities drives what expectations we have of them. If we perceive that they are only able to communicate 1 or 2 words then that is all we ever expect from them. If we have low expectations then we only provide opportunities that support those expectations. If the student isn't achieving more in their communication then we continue to have the same perceptions and expectations. Every student will be at a different language level or proficiency of using their device, but we should always set our expectations higher so they can progress to the next level. Expect a little more, it's a start towards the student achieving more.



[Carole Zangari, 2014](#)

*"It wasn't until this device that we realised how clever this little girl was and what her vocab was. We had an incident on Monday where...she was very naughty during the minute silent, chat, chat, chat, looking at me to make sure I could see her being naughty. Went back to class, and she got a bit of a telling off for doing it. And she went to her device, came up and showed it to me and it was 'Mrs xx is a mean Teacher'...we were so proud...It's let us and her peers know how smart she is and what a really good vocab she's got and how we've really been underestimating what we're doing with her. Does she know good and bad? She knows "mean". She knows everything in between and we're going – 'I think we need to up the ante a lot'".*





## Seven Tips on Preparation

**We all know the old adage ‘Failing to prepare is preparing to fail’. Preparation is so important. It’s about making a great start to implementing AAC. Here are some tips to support making that start.**

### Talk about concerns

It’s perfectly natural to feel a bit scared about supporting a student who uses AAC. You may be worried for example about how using a communication device may impact on verbal communication. Or, for many students who say some words or phrases verbally, what place does a communication device play? Talk about these concerns with your Therapist or check out some [AAC FAQ’s](#), if you don’t feel confident or have some concerns about the device.

*“He has actually become more verbal, so the device seems to have ‘unlocked’ more of his speech and thoughts (almost like it has boosted his confidence to have a voice!)”*

### Plan to make it successful

AAC won’t just happen. We need to plan to make it successful. Plan the activity/scenario, plan the turns the student takes, plan what you will say and model, plan, plan, plan. Plan and you’ll have a much greater chance of success. **Success breeds success.**

### Know the device

Knowing where a few words are on the device (common/core words and a variety of them – verbs/adjectives/nouns etc.) will make it easier to model use of them on the device. **Make a goal to learn 3 new words a week.** This is not your communication system, and you don’t have time to learn where every single word is, but becoming more familiar with it and knowing where a few words are will likely make you feel more confident about using it.

### Work at AAC Language level of the student

Many students that use AAC have receptive language skills that are in advance of their expressive language skills. When supporting AAC use, work at the language level the student is at with the device. For example, if the student is not using the communication system at all, work on single words; if they are using single words, focus on 2-word combinations; if they are forming sentences, work on grammar.

### Think about language functions

We communicate for a wide variety of reasons. Asking for something, making a comment, giving an opinion, greeting others, asking questions, having a chat and telling a joke are just a few amongst many! Language functions move from requesting to more complex interactions. Start with using the device to request or control the environment (words such as ‘stop’, ‘go’, ‘more’, ‘help’, ‘drink’) and then move on to words that allow the student to comment or express their opinion (‘good’, ‘yuck’, ‘fun’, ‘like’). You can then start to think about asking questions and having a chat.

## Scripting

What will you say? What will the student say? What words do you need to model? How much do you need to model? There can be quite a lot to think about when working with a student who uses a communication device. Making a quick script can help us focus on a variety of words, not just the names of things and can make us feel more confident and prepared to model using the device. Remember to model at the students' expressive language level with using the device.

<b>Activity:</b> Bike riding with a friend  <b>Core words:</b> Go, on, thank you  <b>Fringe Words:</b> bike, peers names	
<b>Do and Say this:</b>  <b>EA:</b> where are we <b>GO</b> ing? <b>Student:</b> Bike <b>EA:</b> That's right we're <b>GO</b> ing on the <b>BIKE</b> . Lets <b>GO</b> ! (Student goes on the bike At the end of the bike riding prompt the student to say thank you to the person they have chosen for riding) <b>EA:</b> What could you say to xxx? <b>Student:</b> Thank you <b>EA:</b> <b>THANK YOU (PEERS NAME)</b>	<b>Model this:</b>  <b>GO</b>  <b>GO BIKE. GO</b>        <b>THANK YOU (PEERS NAME)</b>

## You need something to talk about

Do things the student enjoys. Go with the obsessions! Watch a music video, water the plants, feed the chickens, run a race. Even if it's an activity where there is not much communication happening at the time, you can use the device to talk about it later!



*Remember you can talk about things that have happened e.g. yesterday or at the weekend, or that are happening in the future or that are happening right now!*

## Fourteen Tips on Strategies for Supporting AAC Implementation

**There are many things that we, as communication partners can do to support a student to use their device. Here's a few of the ones we have found work the best**

### Expect use of the device

*"Use your talker", "tell me with your device", "I don't understand, how about you get your device".*

When a student is learning to use a communication device to support other communication methods (verbal communication that is unintelligible or limited, gestures, sign, vocalisations, facial expressions), the student may need support to recognise that these methods may not be understood by all communication partners or enable them to communicate more specific and complex messages. When we think about students after they have left school, would the person working in the shop understand the sign for 'orange'? Or would the bus driver understand their speech to know the name of the place they are going to? Perhaps not. By supporting students to use their communication device we are preparing them to become more competent communicators when they leave school or are around less familiar listeners. When you do understand the student's verbal message, first acknowledge that you've understood and respond. Then work with the student to help them say it with their device just so they know how to say it in case of less familiar listeners – "how about we see if we've got those words/that message on your device?"

*"Our student can speak and we can understand some of what he says. But when he goes into the community, they're not going to be able to perhaps understand, so getting that message across was quite difficult for some people because if the student answered and they could understand, well, they would just go ahead. They wouldn't use the device, whereas we're saying, "Can you show us on your device?" So that when he's in the community, [he will] be able to do it. So getting that message across was a huge plus for us, and I feel like probably 80 percent of people are on board with making sure that that happens"*

### Tune into the device, interpret and respond

Tuning in to a computerised voice is actually fairly difficult, especially in a busy and noisy classroom. However, take time to be near or with the student using AAC and respond to anything they say using the device. This is how the student learns that what they say has an impact on the world around them. Interpret whatever they say as meaningful and relevant! Even if it seems like it has come from nowhere, the actual likelihood is that it does have meaning to the student (we just don't know about it) or it's a miss-hit or perhaps a 'stim' (pressing the same buttons over and over). Whatever it is, respond to it. For the child that says 'swim' out of nowhere say 'oh you like swimming. Did you go swimming last night?' For the student who comments 'epic fail!' you may respond with 'I know you don't like doing this, but 5 more minutes and then we can do xx' When people tune in, listen and respond to what we're saying it makes us feel important. Same thing goes for our students using communication devices.

### Modelling

There is lots of information available about modelling language, but essentially it refers to using the device yourself to show the student how they could say it, to help them learn their device, and understand the symbols. In the same way we model language to young children developing communication (think about the words we say to children who are learning to talk 'yummy',

'banana', 'more', 'stop' etc.), students learning to use AAC need the same input. You can provide this input by modelling the words on the device as you say them. Model, model, model! Model lots of language in natural contexts. Repeat, repeat, repeat the same words in a range of situations. Remember, you don't have to know where every single word is. Pick a few words, and model those at the appropriate times. Modelling is one of the most important things you can do to help a student using AAC. All this modelling will help the student learn how the symbols can be used in real situations to say real things.



### Expand Language - Match and stretch!

This goes hand in hand with working at students AAC language level. Always stay one step ahead. The idea is that you MATCH what the student has said by saying and modelling the same thing and then you STRETCH it by adding another word, essentially repeating and modelling an expanded version of what the student has said.

Here's an example:

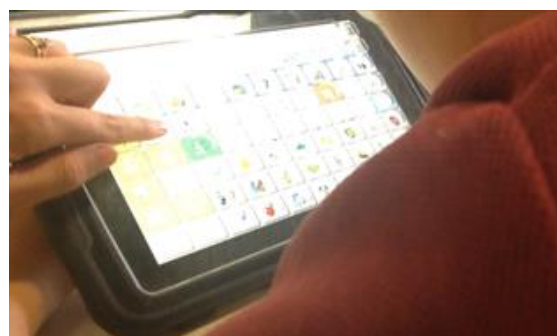
**Student:** Glue

**Adult:** Glue (MATCH it). Glue on (STRETCH it by Adding another word).

You can do this at any language level. Think about the student who is using more words and is starting to learn grammar. At this stage you may only need to STRETCH language.

**Student:** Put glue on

**Adult:** Ok sure. Let's 'Put the glue on' (STRETCH by adding 'the').



By matching and stretching language like this you are continually supporting development of the AAC users' language skills. Modelling more specific and complex language will ultimately support them to become more competent communicators.



## Create opportunities

One of the easiest and most effective ways to increase device use is by making sure there are opportunities for the student to do so. It's a fairly simple concept – create an environment or scenario in which the student needs or wants to communicate. There are a number of ways you can do this – hold on to the pencil case/crayon container/paints/shapes so the student has to ask (want red, want more, want heart), give them a shoe instead of a paintbrush (no, don't want, need brush), ask a question, give them a choice (do you want to read or play?), show them a toy or gadget they'll need help with to operate (help, you help, need help), don't automatically help with recess or lunch boxes (help, open, thanks), show the student a picture they'll love (awesome, cool, silly). By setting up these opportunities or temptations you're creating a reason for the student to communicate.

*“Finding any opportunity to use the device is easy, it's not scary!”*

## Routines

The reason why routines are so great is because within a routine pretty much the same thing happens and similar things are said. They therefore create wonderful opportunities for our Students using AAC to practice the same language over and over again. And as we know, practice and repetition are really important for students to become fluent and effortless communicators and build their language skills. Routines happen across the whole school day. One easy way to do this is to map out what happens during the day and pick a couple of routine times. For example, what happens at the beginning of every day? The students sit down and the teacher calls the register. What happens if the teacher calls their name and waits (they can say 'here', 'I'm here', 'good Morning Miss'). This routine happens every day and allows the AAC user to practice language – even better that it's the same language and participation as their peers

## WAAAAAAAAAAAAAIT!

Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. And wait some more. Waiting is so important for students using AAC. Using a communication device is much slower than speaking (thinking about what someone might have asked you, what you want to say, where the words are on the device, finding the words on the device and then communicating the message). Wait to give the student time to respond. Wait so the student knows you expect something from them. Wait to see what happens. Try counting to 10 in your head before offering a prompt or modelling. It may feel quite strange at first, but give it a try and see what happens. It's one of the most powerful things you can do.

*“Don't be in hurry – if you do it for your student you have robbed them of a chance too say it”*



## Prompting

So you've waited and nothing has happened. What now? Offering another type of prompt might help. Prompts are often graded or offered as a hierarchy with the idea that we develop a plan to fade them out so that the student becomes progressively more independent. When we learn something new, such as a new word, or what to say in a particular situation, many students can be successful but with help e.g. hand over hand assistance to press the icon or a direct model. Over time the idea is to reduce the prompts e.g. a bit of a verbal prompt by leaving a gap/sentence completion; you want... (more). Some prompting hierarchies can be found at [YAACK](#).



## Think about the questions asked

Do you want some more? Do you like it? Shall we go outside? Closed questions are great and definitely have a place in our day-to-day communication, but they only require a yes/no response. Many students can communicate yes/no in other ways than using a device (e.g. verbally, by nodding or shaking their heads, giving a thumbs up/down). To give the student lots of opportunity to use their device we can first make a comment and see what they say. Then maybe we can ask questions that require them to answer using specific vocabulary. Think about "Do you want red (yes/no)" vs. "what colour do you want?" – with this second question we've created an opportunity for the student to use their device to respond with 'red' (or any other colour they might like!)

## Think about questions even more

We can then think about how we ask those open questions. The way you ask them can provide a hidden prompt or cue to guide the student's response. Think about these two questions:

*"What colour next?" vs. "what colour do you WANT next?"*

An appropriate answer to the first question would be 'red'. However, with the second question you are providing (and emphasising) a certain verb you might like the AAC user to use in their response. These hidden prompts are more likely to lead to an 'I want red' response. More practice for the AAC user in using and building language. Bingo!



## Go with the AAC user's interest!

It's human nature to want to talk about things you are interested in and many students who communicate using AAC may have very significant or intense interests. Use those interests. Talk about Thomas the Tank, rubbish trucks or microwaves. The student using AAC is more likely to fully engage and use their device to talk about a topic, if they are interested in it. You can then generalise this language into other areas.



## Twelve Tips on Resources for Implementation

### Tar Heel Reader

[Tar Heel Reader](#) is a free resource that provides a bank of easy to read, speech enabled books and also allows you to make books of your own. Reading any book creates lots of opportunity for communication with repetition of language. The student can say what they would like to read a book about, comment on what they see/what's happening, ask you to turn the page and so on. Just like reading a book although all the more exciting for some as it's on the computer! Tar Heel Readers can also be printed and made into real books.



### Use games you already have

Use games around the classroom to encourage language and use of the students' communication device. Games are great because they require lots of repeated language which achieves a range language functions (e.g. giving instructions, asking and answering questions and commenting). Hopefully those games stay in your classroom and can be played again and again so the student can keep practicing that language. Let the student choose the game. Control over this is likely to result in more interest. Games such as, Simon says, Go Fish, Guess Who, Battleship, I spy, and 20 Questions are good ones to try and are great for engaging peers.



### AAC Language Lab

[AAC Language Lab](#) offers a collection of free books and activities to support students using communication devices. With focus on language stages, core vocabulary and interactive materials, there is a collection of free resources to print off and try out with an option to subscribe to access the full range. These resources can be used with any communication system and are made easy to print off and get going. The scripts and Smart Charts on this website are specific to Minspeak devices, but can give you ideas to create these for your students specific systems.



## Get outdoors

Many students who use AAC may need a break from the classroom from time to time. As well as providing students with the time out they need, these breaks also create perfect opportunities for communication! Get a ball out and throw it back and forth, when it's your time to throw, wait for the student to tell you 'go' or 'throw'! Give directions for different actions: 'run', 'hop' and 'jump'. Play a game of skittles ('go', 'awesome', 'fun', 'again', 'more', 'down'). Chances are the student will be fully engaged and interested and what better time to get communicating!



## Use everyday technology

Tablets and technology can be very motivating and there are lots of apps available that will suit and engage students. Look at pictures together, play on an app, comment, chat, give instructions, have fun. Check out the [ILC website](#) for a list of 'getting started' apps for different areas of learning.



## Barrier games

Barrier games can create a motivating and fun experience for practising and developing language skills. They involve a number of fundamental communication requirements such as listening, receptive and expressive language skills. They can be created to target specific language structures or language functions such as giving directions, asking questions, explaining, and commenting! Put a barrier up between the two players and attempt to create the same thing. It could be a tower ('put red on', 'put small blue on') or a scene ('dog under bed', 'in box'). They create great ways of practicing core vocabulary in a structured, repetitive activity. They are pretty good fun too!

## Instruction and Message Giver

Find opportunities for the student to give instructions or messages (made up ones if needs be!) to other people in the school that the student may not normally chat to. The more exposure and awareness other people in school get of the student using the device, the more they will be on board with supporting it. These communication partners don't have to use the device, or know where any of the words are. They just need to talk to the student, respond and tune in to the device as the students voice. This is a great way to support the student to develop their social communication skills with more unfamiliar people.

*"Even our principal has been amazed at what's happened. He just can't believe the amount of expression now that he can get from this student....he would take a message down to the principal and do it on his device, things like that"*

## Shared reading

Books are such a fabulous resource. They create rich language experiences, with vocabulary that is repeated over and over again. To get the most out of reading, read books together. Start by reading the book to the student with no expectations of them to use their device. Choose a few words you would like to model as per your preparation. Model the words as you say them on the students' device e.g. 'the boy is **sleeping**' (model **SLEEP** on the device). After lots of repetition encourage the student to start to jointly share the book with you. Encourage them to use their device to fill in gaps, e.g. the boy is ..... (**Sleeping**), she is.... (**Drinking**). You can continue to build language with books in a very structured and repetitive way.

*"During class group reading I have looked for appropriate categories on the device to match the classes reading book so he is able to join in the class discussions"*

## Singing

So many students love music, so use it! Sing songs and leave a gap for the student to fill in the word with their device (Think: "Old MacDonald has a farm... And on that farm he had a...." Student using AAC chooses the animal and fills in the gap). Songs can be done one on one with the student or in groups with peers.

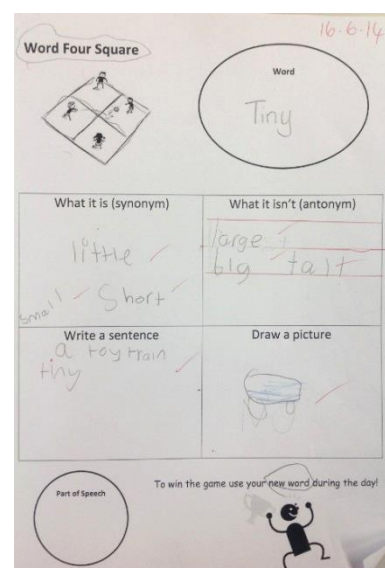
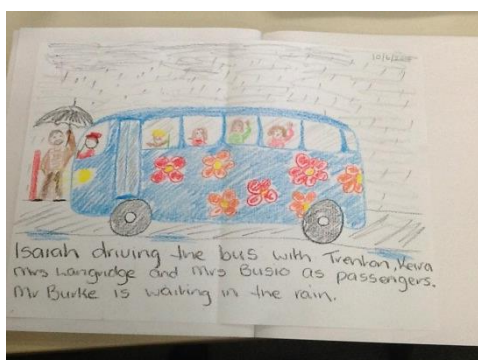


## Numeracy

Most communication devices have a numbers page (if they don't program one in, or ask for support if you are unsure how to do this). Use this to complete maths work. Think about other words that can be used in maths activities to describe numbers: 'same', 'more', 'different', 'bigger', 'less than'.

## Literacy

Literacy is such a huge topic. It's a key skill and as such is a core subject within school. It is however, recognised that students using AAC devices often leave school with poor literacy attainment. Students can develop their literacy skills using their AAC device. Students with emerging literacy skills need a reason to write. Write signs for the classroom, have classroom vote once a week with votes written and posted in a box, make a card for someone. The student can say what they want to on their device and copy it down, or depending on their fine motor skills, type it or have the communication partner help them write it. Use the spell page to form the words the class is working on. Don't be afraid to let the student get it wrong. We can see what the student is writing so it's easy for us to jump in and correct it. Let the student write it incorrectly and hear it. Does it sound right? Then support them to spell it correctly. Use the device for phonics work; "Tell me a word that starts with 'c'", "what rhymes with mat?", "how many syllables in 'rabbit'?", "I spy with my little eye something beginning with 'd'". The student can use their vocabulary, spell page and numbers page to participate and respond in all these instances.

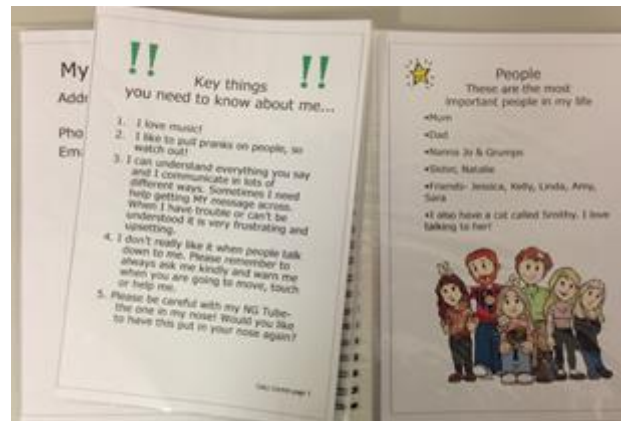


## Describing activities

Find opportunities where the student has to describe objects. Put things in a feely bag and describe them to see if the other person can guess what they are, look and feel things to describe them. These games are fun require the student to words other than nouns!

## Communication passports and about me books

Often students will be more motivated to look at and read books that are relevant and motivating to them. Make up your own books using Word or PowerPoint. Perhaps make up books that have photos of the student doing things, or things that they like e.g. 'my favourite things'. These books form a great focus of something to talk about. They give the communication partner hints about the person and things they can ask about/talk about. Check out the [Communication Passports](#) website for templates and more information.





## Getting Peers Involved



**Peers are so powerful. They are the people the AAC user really wants to talk to. Chances are these people will remain with the student, in the same year and class group for the time they are at school. Teachers and Education Assistants will likely come and go as is the nature of schools.**

**Here are a few tips for setting up communication opportunities with peers**

### Run a peer communication lesson

If the student has a Speech Pathologist, they may be able to help with this. Essentially this lesson would involve a chat about communication and practice at using a communication system (a low tech, paper based system works just as well as high tech). It gives peers the opportunity to experience communicating with an AAC system and to learn about things they can do to help the student using a communication device (interacting, waiting, asking the student if they can use their device before doing so). It also provides the forum for peers to ask questions about the device and things they may have been wondering about or are concerned about. It's a great way to empower peers to get involved and get the whole class talking AAC.



### Reading roster

Set up daily/weekly reading roster. Peers put their names down to read with the student. At these times, adults really take a step back. It's about the students interacting and having time together.

## Get directing

Play games in groups that require giving and following instructions. The student using AAC get a turn to give the directions. Try 'Simon Says', or 'What's the Time Mr Wolf'. Program pre-stored phrases in ("It's dinner time!").



## Interviews, Surveys and Presentations

Create opportunities to interview or conduct surveys of different people in the class and school. What colour is liked the most in class? Which football team do people support? Perhaps you are doing a maths task on graphs and the students' job could be to conduct a survey to get the information for the graph. Cook something and get feedback from the class. What did it taste like? What should we make next time? Work in pairs with the student using AAC asking the questions and a peer taking a tally.



## Group Work

Work in small groups and have the students complete a task that requires them to communicate and work together. Bake something together (What will you make? What do we have to do next?). Write a poem or a story - the student using AAC could suggest characters, places etc.



## News time!

Perhaps once a week you spend 5 minutes having class conversation or structured news time where students share something about themselves or something they have done. This news can be pre-programmed into the device with the student before this activity or programmed at home. You could also do this as a writing task using the device to support vocabulary and sentence structure.

Write 3 things that you did today Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. I went AEL training

2. I ate chicken for dinner

3. after I ate dinner watched Masterchef

## Joke time!

Get telling a few jokes. Perhaps before home time you spend 5 mins telling jokes as a class. The student can participate by having could pre-prepared in their device.

*"Who would have thought we would have assisted him to achieve so many firsts. Cooking and decorating, interviews, independent interactions, lunch and recess successes with conversations."*

## Three Survival Techniques!

**A few, self-tried and tested tips on how to keep going when it feels like it's all going wrong!**

### **It doesn't matter if you don't know everything (phew!)**

....we never will. The best thing to do is just get going. Try it, give it time, if it doesn't work, try something different! Communication is messy!

### **Know your support systems (and the name of the device!)**

Where can you get support? Often if the student has a therapy team, you may be able to access them for support. Many device suppliers have websites with resources, information, contact details and trouble-shooting sections to help. Know the name of the device your student uses so you can Google it! Know who the Australian Supplier is so you can call them for technical support. Perhaps think about having a handy cheat sheet with the contact details of the therapy team, device supplier and support websites.

Your local ILC can also support you with where to find more information [www.ilc.com.au](http://www.ilc.com.au) .

### **Evaluate and celebrate**

Think about if its making a difference, rather than 'Am I doing it right?' There is no right. Each student, communication system and school are different. There is no one size fits all to AAC. Chances are if it's making a difference you're doing something right. Think about how you can measure this. Perhaps you could video the student using their device, have a "communication success of the week", share stories at staff meetings, with the family and other professionals, take time to reflect at the end of the day or week, write things down. Most importantly don't forget to celebrate what a great job you are doing!



## OUR TOP TIP

If you take one thing from reading this resource, then take this.

Our number 1 Top Tip....

# MAKE IT FUN FOR EVERYONE!

Communicating is and should be fun. Make it enjoyable and exciting. Chat to friends, tell a joke, build social relationships, learn, share thoughts, likes and dislikes. Make time to have chats without a fixed agenda. Ask about things you genuinely don't know about. Get everyone involved. Enjoy it!



*"Now you know how much this person knows. I knew that our student knew a lot more than people were giving him credit for. And this device has meant that people now know how much he knows, and he knows how much he knows and he can tell people how much he knows."*

*"It's been different in how they've [peers] perceived this child as well. She's been invited to birthday parties. She hasn't been invited before. She's been invited over to play, where [she] hasn't been before 'cause they can see that she's a clever little girl and she's a funny little girl and she's - she's good to be around"*

## Contact

For more information about the Tips and Tricks and the NGCS Intensive AAC Support in Schools project please contact

### ILC Technology

**Independent Living Centre of WA**

**(08) 9381 06098**

[technology@ilc.com.au](mailto:technology@ilc.com.au)

[www.ilc.com.au](http://www.ilc.com.au)

## Acknowledgements

Thank you Non-Government Centre Support (NGCS) for their support in funding this project.

We would especially like to thank all the students and school staff who have opened up their classrooms to us! These tips and tricks have come from what we have learnt from these wonderful people who work tirelessly to provide the best opportunities for their students. You are all amazing!

*Christ The King School*

*Corpus Christi College*

*Craigie Heights Primary School*

*Curtin Primary School*

*Hillarys Primary School*

*Kolbe Catholic College*

*Mount Pleasant Primary School*

*North Morley Primary School*

*Osborne Park Primary School*

*Parkwood Primary School*

*Sacred Heart Primary School*

*Sacred Heart College*

*St Kieran's Primary School*