



Quiz or Conversation?

Balancing questions and comments in AAC interactions

Communication is about connecting with others, sharing thoughts, feelings, opinions and ideas. Communication shouldn't be a test. It is important for us to look beyond just asking questions when we are interacting with our students using AAC.

What's this called?

What do we do with this?

What colour is it?

Being asked a string of questions can feel like a test and can reduce motivation to communicate.

Excessive use of questions can also limit the amount of communication that students initiate themselves and make our students more passive. If most of our interactions with our students revolve around us asking them questions this can teach them that they wait to be asked before they communicate.

Asking too many questions creates an unnatural balance and puts a lot of pressure on a student to respond. This doesn't best support learning for some of our students.

We can best support communication development by focusing on conversation and not testing. Questions do have an important role in communication, however we want to find a balance between questions and other communication such as making comments within our interactions with our students.



Read more about why we might de-emphasise questions in AAC therapy from Carole Zangari <http://practicalaac.org/practical/dont-ask-5-reasons-to-de-emphasize-questions-in-your-aac-therapy/>

What else might we say or do?

Use comments and statements

You may make an observation, share your opinion or feeling, or make a different statement. Where possible you can model some of this language on the student's AAC system. Let's think about how you may change some of your questions to statements:

Instead of...

What's that called?



Could you comment ...

Wow, a big train!



Do you like it?



I think that's great

Expand on a student's message

Expand or extend a student's message by adding extra information or more advanced grammar. Where possible, model this expansion on the student's AAC system.

Eg. if student says...

you may model expanded messages such as...

dog

'yes, it's a big dog'

'I like the dog'

You may use a leading statement

In some situations using a leading statement can hint to a child that they may wish to communicate something, without you directly asking a question e.g.

'I'd love to hear your ideas'

'You look hungry'

'I wonder what we could play next'

Create motivating opportunities and wait expectantly

An important way to support a student to communicate more is to create situations where they want to communicate. When we create motivating opportunities and provide natural cues we can support a student to participate and communicate more without bombarding them with questions.



Let's also think about the types of questions we're asking

Yes/No questions

Do you like it? Do you want red? Do you need help?

These questions can all be answered with a 'yes' or 'no'. While yes/no questions can have an important role in checking and clarifying with students at some times, we can think about how we can ask questions differently to allow our students to use a broader range of language.

What did you think of that? What colour do you want next?

Open vs Closed questions

Many closed questions can be answered with a single word or short factual answers. Asking open questions can allow students to give a more extended answer and really express their knowledge, ideas and opinions.

Can you tell me about ...? What did you think about ...? Describe? What do you think will happen? Questions such as these can elicit longer, more descriptive answers.

When we use more open questions we can open up conversation and find out more about our students' thoughts, opinions and ideas.

Academic testing questions

Testing of academic skills is valid and does not follow the same rules as test questions in communication. However it can still be useful to consider the proportion of our lessons which focus on 'teaching' and how much 'testing' is really required.

Read this 'Testing versus Teaching' post by Dr Sally Clendon for more thoughts on the topic <https://www.isaac-online.org/testing-versus-teaching/>

Questions you know the answer to

While it makes sense when we're doing academic testing to ask some questions we know the answers to, in conversation and general interaction this rarely makes sense. *What's that called?* When a student is clearly playing with a train, *What's your name?* asks the staff member who knows the student well. This can be frustrating for students if they know that you already know the answer and may just feel like a test. Asking genuine questions about their ideas or opinions, or sharing your own thoughts can result in much more meaningful interactions.

The aim: finding a balance

Balancing our use of genuine questions with comments and other statements can result in much more meaningful and motivating interactions.

