



# Communication Opportunities in the Classroom

We all communicate for many different reasons throughout the day. It's important to remember that our students using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) also need the opportunity to communicate for a wide range of reasons, including those shown below.

Students who use AAC may need more support to take advantage of natural communication opportunities in the classroom.

**“If a teacher (or instructional assistant) did not provide a specific opportunity for a student to use a specific communication behavior ... then most often the student did not communicate”**

(Rowland, 1990, p. 263)

**“In many cases, these students will only communicate in response to deliberate attempts by an adult to elicit a specific communicative behavior”**

(Rowland, 1990, p. 270)

## Reasons we communicate



(Ahern, 2012)

We are aiming to find **meaningful, motivating** and **frequent** opportunities for students to communicate, to help them join in learning and social interactions to reach their full communication potential.

Using routine, regular activities can provide real opportunities and lots of chances to practice. We can find opportunities for students to communicate in all subjects and learning areas such as science, maths, mat time, art, and more.

Communication in the Classroom

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# Planning for communication

Planning for communication exchanges ahead of time can help to maximise communication and teaching opportunities.

## You can plan opportunities across your class timetable

Timetable	Communication opportunities	Beginner Communicator	Intermediate Communicator	Advanced Communicator
<b>Morning arrival</b>	Greetings Social chat	'Hi' 'what have you been up to?' (whole message)	'Good morning Mrs Smith' 'what's up John?'	'what did you do on the weekend?'
<b>Morning fitness</b>	Give directions to peers.  Encourage/cheer on peers.  Comment on activity.	'go', 'run', 'throw' etc.  'wow'  'fun' 'like' 'bored'	'you can go', 'run fast', 'throw big'  'Go John go'  'I like it', 'running is fun'	'everyone run fast 3 times'  'Go Tom, You're the best'  'I don't like running' 'I like to win'
<b>Sharing a book</b>				
<b>Science</b>				
<b>Maths</b>				
<b>Lunch</b>				
<b>Cooking</b>				

## You can think about:

### Interaction with peers, not just staff

Giving directions to a peer or having a fun or silly social chat or joke with a friend can be very motivating for many students.

### Range of reasons to communicate

Consider the range of 'reasons we communicate' on page 1, there's lots more to communication than just requesting.

### Modifying an activity to meet the opportunity

Think about slight changes to the way we run an activity, such as not automatically giving out all the required materials, or pairing students to share ideas can prompt more communication.

### Waaaaaiit!

Build in a pause, count to 10 in your head. This allows time for a student to recognise the opportunity to participate, think about what they could say and generate a message.





“The success of any student's augmentative/alternative communication program is greatly increased when all staff involved embed it's use within everyday programming.

Augmentative/Alternative communication implementation should not be viewed as separate from the learning program. Rather, as the educational plan is developed for each student, opportunities for AAC use should be infused into the curriculum.

This gives the student real reasons to practice and apply their AAC skills.”

(Maro & Tufte, 2005)

## You could create a script

Scripts can be really useful for supporting classroom staff to use communication devices consistently, particularly if they are new to the device. Scripts might be very detailed with exactly what you press and say or they might be brief, it depends on what works for your classroom team.

**Activity:** Bubbles

**Goal:** Using 2-3 word phrases

**Target words:** more, blow

**Cue/prompt:** hold bubble wand, expectant waiting, direct attention to the device

**Do and say this**

**Adult:** let's blow bubbles

*Blow bubbles and enjoy watching or popping them*

WAIT .....

**Student:** blow bubbles

**Adult:** yes, let's blow more bubbles

*Blow bubbles, enjoy and repeat.*

**Model this on the device**

Blow bubbles

Wow

Blow more bubbles





## A few more ideas for communication in the school day

**Delivering a message** to another class or to the front office using their device.

**Giving instructions** to a peer within a game. Giving the instruction to the class in sport or giving the recipe instructions in cooking.

**Choosing a friend** to work with or show their work to.

**Group work** can provide more opportunities for sharing ideas and other communication.

**Describing** vocabulary can be practiced with a mystery bag, guessing games, I spy (with descriptors, rather than letters) etc.

**Interviews or Surveys** are great to practice asking questions and interacting with a range of people, using different topics or vocabulary.

**Games** such as barrier games, Guess Who, Bingo, Simon Says or any others you have.

**Rate that book/song/clip** using commenting vocabulary (positive, neutral and negative)

**Conversation Time** can be an allocated time for students to share something about what they've done or chat about their favourite topic.

**Joke Time** can be a fun way to end the day.

**Keep it fun and engaging and give it a go!**



## References

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Maro, J., & Tuft, L. (2005). *Communication needs: where to begin*. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from <http://atto.buffalo.edu/registered/ATBasics/Populations/aac/begin.php>

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