

Selecting the Right AAC System: A Practical Guide for Teams

A Decision-Making Framework for Matching Students with Effective Communication Tools

Purpose & Scope

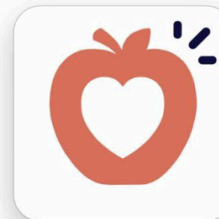
This guide focuses on Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) system selection. While AAC is a subset of Assistive Technology (AT), it has unique considerations that require collaboration between speech-language pathologists (SLPs), educators, families, and the student. Selecting the right AAC system involves understanding the student's communication needs, matching those needs to appropriate features, trialing options, and making data-based decisions.

AAC Decision-Making Process

Step	Guiding Questions	Evidence Sources	Example Actions
Identify Communication Needs	What are the primary expressive and receptive challenges?	Observations, language samples, assessments	List priority communication functions (e.g., requesting, commenting, social greetings)
Determine Access Needs	How will the student physically access the system?	OT/PT input, motor assessments	Consider direct touch, switch access, eye gaze, head tracking
Match Needs to AAC Features	Which system features best support the student's skills and goals?	AAC comparison charts, vendor demos	Identify core vocabulary options, symbol sets, voice output choices
Trial Period	How will we measure success during the trial?	Data sheets, frequency counts, communication logs	Use system in multiple environments with defined metrics
Review & Decide	Did the system meet communication goals?	Progress monitoring data, student/family feedback	Select, adjust, or trial a different system
Plan Implementation	Who will train and support the student and team?	Training logs, support plans	Embed AAC use into daily routines and across staff

AAC System Comparison Quick Reference

System/App	Key Features	Best For...
Proloquo2Go	Symbol-based, customizable grid size, robust core vocabulary	Students needing visual symbols with motor planning consistency
LAMP Words for Life	Motor planning-based layout, consistent symbol location	Students with autism or motor planning challenges
TouchChat HD	Highly customizable, multiple vocab sets, integrates with WordPower	Students needing flexibility in layout and symbol sets
Snap + Core First	Core word focus, easy navigation, literacy supports	Emerging communicators and developing literacy skills
TD Snap Eye Gaze	Designed for eye-gaze access, customizable vocabulary	Students with severe physical limitations
GoTalk NOW	Low-cost option, multiple pages, multimedia integration	Students needing simple, low-barrier AAC entry



Matching Student Profiles to AAC Features

- Emerging communicator with limited literacy → Core word systems with symbol support (e.g., Snap + Core First)
 - Student with strong motor planning needs → Consistent layout systems (e.g., LAMP Words for Life)
 - Physically limited access → Eye-gaze compatible systems (e.g., TD Snap Eye Gaze)
 - Needs rapid customization for academic use → Highly flexible systems (e.g., TouchChat HD)
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Trial & Data Collection Checklist

- Identify 2–3 target communication functions for trial.
 - Use system in at least 3 different environments.
 - Collect frequency counts or communication attempts per target function.
 - Document prompts needed (verbal, physical, visual).
 - Gather student, staff, and family feedback.
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Case Example: Selecting an AAC System

Ethan, a 9-year-old with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, had limited speech and used gestures inconsistently. The team identified social interaction and classroom participation as priorities. OT recommended eye-gaze access due to limited fine motor control.

The team trialed a low-tech eye-gaze board, then a high-tech TD Snap Eye Gaze system. Data showed Ethan initiated greetings and answered questions with minimal prompts after two weeks.

Based on consistent gains and positive feedback, the team selected TD Snap Eye Gaze, developed a training plan, and embedded use across all subjects.

Common Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them

- Choosing based solely on adult preference without student trial.
- Overlooking access needs and physical limitations.
- Failing to provide adequate training for staff and family.
- Using the system only in speech therapy instead of across settings.
- Switching systems too quickly without data review.

Content for this resource was developed in collaboration with Rebecca Cann, Inclusive Educational Consulting (<https://inclusiveeducationalconsulting.com>).