

Choosing a Communication Device

Considerations and Feature Matching

When conducting Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) assessments we need to match the individual to the AAC tools, devices and strategies that will meet their communication needs (McBride, 2001). With an increasing range of AAC options available to us we need to maintain comprehensive evaluation processes to ensure suitable devices are chosen and provide sound justification for the device purchase particularly if funding is being sought.

McBride (2011) suggests considering the following questions when beginning an AAC assessment:

- What does the individual need, want, or desire to communicate? How do they currently communicate these?
- Where, when and with whom will the individual communicate?
- What are the individual's current skills and abilities?
- What is the individual's language ability? What do they understand?
- What are the device functions and features required?
- How will you make the best choice of communication device? Who should be involved in the decision-making process?
- If the device has already been provided, is the individual currently using the AAC device? What are the barriers of the current device?

This resource follows the Matching Persons and AAC Technology Model (Hill, 2010) to help compare communication device features as part of the overall AAC assessment process. It is designed to give you a start point for some of the features you may need to consider for the individual you are working with. You can always contact one of our team to help you understand the features of the Link Assistive Products!

How to use the Comparison Table

First use the table to help you determine which features an individual requires. Consider which features are reasonable and necessary for the individual and why. Also consider future features required by the individual. Then use the table to help compare the communication device options. Add other features that may be specific to the individual. Make notes as to why each feature is required by the individual, this will start to form part of your rationale when applying for funding and making decisions regarding best options.

Speech Pathology Australia's AAC Clinical Guideline (2012) suggests comparison of features is an essential part of the AAC assessment process with comparison of the individual's performance on using *at least two* AAC systems required to determine the relative benefits of different device features. A full feature-matching assessment ensures that more than just cost of devices are compared (Speech Pathology Australia, 2012). If you are looking for more support models and frameworks to support your AAC assessment **The Participation Model** (Beukelman and Mirenda, 2013) and **SETT Framework** (Zabela, 2005) can be helpful, see reference list for details.

Feature	Description	Is it needed by the individual & why?	Device _____	Device _____
Primary Considerations				
Language Representation Method				
Single Meaning Pictures	Pictures represent one word			
Alphabet	Access language by spelling			
Multiple Meaning Icons	Sequence of pictures to make a word			
Vocabulary Organisation				
Semantic	Words are organised by meaning or category			
Grammatical	Words are organised by word order (grammar)			
Topic / Activity	Words are organised by topics and activities			
Alphabetic	Words are organised by first letter (alphabetical)			
Visual Scene	Words and phrases are embedded in an image			
Pragmatic	Words are organised according to language function			
Vocabulary				
Core Vocabulary	Everyday words used eg I, like, want, go, big			
Fringe Vocabulary	Words specific to topics eg cheeseburger, Kmart			
Phrases	Words are organised into phrases			
ABC Keyboard	Alphabet organised in ABC format			
QWERTY Keyboard	Alphabet organised in QWERTY format			
Customisable Vocabulary	Software allows words to be added and customised			
Robust Vocabulary	Enough words to meet communication requirements			
Method of Utterance Generation				
Spontaneous Novel Utterance Generation	Individual words can be combined to create sentences			
Pre-stored sentences /phrases	Words are stored in short sentences accessed through a single button			
Spelling	Words and sentences are created through spelling using the alphabet			
Other Features Specific to the Individual				

Feature	Description	Is it needed by the individual & why?	Device _____	Device _____
Secondary Considerations				
User Interface				
Symbols	Picture library eg PCS, Symbol Stix, High Contrast PCS			
Navigation	Comment on ease of navigation to find words			
Consistent Vocabulary Placement	Comment on vocabulary placement and how it promotes motor automaticity			
Ease of editing and programming	Comment on editing features eg quick modify, link out to camera			
Search Function	Ability to search for words within software.			
Hide Buttons	Ability to hide buttons to reduce page complexity Hide single buttons? Hide multiple buttons? Hide word lists?			
Operating System	Eg Windows 10, IOS, Android			
Control Interface – Access Method				
Direct Touch	Comment on settings			
Head Pointing	Comment on settings			
Eye Gaze / Pointing	Comment on settings eg dwell time, calibration			
Switch Scanning (1 or 2)	Comment on settings eg scan patterns, scan speed			
Mouse / Joystick	Comment on settings			
Multiple Access Methods	Consider need for motor skill change			
Outputs				
Speech (voices)	Voice options eg Aus voice, child voice			
Voice Personalisation	Ability to message bank, change pitch, rate of speech			
Speakers	Comment on speaker volume			
IR Controls	Infra-red remote outputs			
Wifi	Able to connect to internet via wifi. Does the user have wifi?			
Bluetooth	Able to connect to Bluetooth devices			
Data logging	Able to record data within the device			
Back Up	Comment on how back up and restoring is done			
Accessories				
Durable casing	Device is durable or additional casing available			
Keyguards	Comment on keyguard if required			
Handle / Carry Strap	Device comes with accessory			
Mounting	Device able to be mounted			
Stand	Comment on how device stands			

Feature	Description	Is it needed by the individual & why?	Device _____	Device _____
Tertiary Considerations				
Integrated Features				
Environmental / Remote Controls	Comment on ability to control remotes eg TV, video, music, lights			
Music Player	In built music playing pages			
Camera	In built camera 1 or 2			
Social media	Ability to share to social media eg Facebook, Twitter			
Email	In built email, email pages			
Computer Access	Comment on computer access functions			
Phone	Ability to connect to a mobile phone Consider compatible phones			
Skype	Ability to work with Skype			
Behaviour Supports	Visual schedule, timers			
Dedicated / Non-Dedicated	Mainstream tablet vs dedicated AAC			
Training and Support				
Local Supplier	Device has a local supplier to support use			
Technical Support	Device has easily accessible technical troubleshooting. Comment on how support is accessed.			
Website Support	The device has manuals, website supports, FAQs			
Videos and Webinars	Training videos are available			
Implementation Resources	Device has therapy resources to support learning			
Non-electronic version	Device has a paper based version available			
Warranty	Comment on warranty periods			
Device repairs	Comment on repair options eg local supplier, free screen repairs			
External Editing software	Device has software for editing and programming of the device. Is this software free?			
Other Specifications				
Battery Life	Hours of battery life			
Weight	Weight of device			
Portability	Comment on device portability / mounting options			
Screen Size				
Device Cost	Consider pricing of device and accessories			
Environmental Considerations	Comment on device suitability eg in home, community, school			

References

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