



Core Word Classroom

There are many ways to roll out a core word classroom. Three basic principles are:

- 1) Be intentional about the words you select.**
- 2) Be systematic in how you teach them.**
- 3) Work predictability into your core word routines.**

However you decide to provide this intervention, make sure to:

1. Select specific word(s) to focus on
2. Build whole group/small group lessons that highlight this word
3. Have materials available in the classroom to support learning this word
4. Help staff know how to use the word for a variety of functions (e.g., requesting, interacting socially, sharing information, etc.)
5. Help staff know how to use the word for every part of the daily schedule (e.g., during transitions, lunch time, music, PE, etc.)
6. Include necessary fringe vocabulary for activity

You can structure your intervention with:

1. Core Word of the Week
2. Core Words of the Week
3. Core Words of the month
4. Structure it in a way that makes sense for your population

Activity Ideas:

1. <https://saltillo.com/images/putting-aided-language-into-practice-choosing-vocab-activity-first-.pdf>
2. <https://coreword.assistiveware.com/c/core-word-of-the-week>
3. https://www.aacandautism.com/assets/uploads/Core_Word_of_the_Week.pdf
4. <https://aaclanguage.com/> (some free, some require subscriptions)
5. <https://tarheelreader.org> create or use books using target vocabulary
6. Make powerpoints that follow familiar stories/songs and highlight core words
7. Used shared book reading to highlight core words
8. Cooking - use simple recipes to highlight core words
9. Arts/crafts activities to highlight core words
10. Daily Routines - eating, bathrooming, washing hands, etc. are excellent places to model core words because they happen frequently throughout the day/week
11. Teachers Pay Teachers - search AAC to find activity ideas. Quality products can be found at:
 - a. Susan Berkowitz
 - b. Rachel Maedel
 - c. Speechy Musings
 - d. Carol Goossens



Core Word Classroom Foundational Principles

Availability - Where is your student's device?

Students using AAC need to have access to their devices or systems at all times, in all places, all day long. This sends a very strong message that the AAC device is important and necessary. It also prevents AAC from becoming an activity. If a student is using an iPad for their AAC, this should be used for communication only. When a student has other needs that require an iPad, then 2 separate iPads are needed. Adults or students can be responsible for carrying the device during the school day.

Here are common barriers and solutions to AAC availability:

- PE - have AAC device against the wall
- Recess - staff uses and carries core board
- Swimming - adult has laminated core board available
- Field trips - take AAC device in backpack; adult has core board
- Device goes to locked screen - in an iPad change settings to NEVER under Auto-Lock
- Student Owned Device - work with family to make device accessible during all parts of the school day
- No individualized system - use classroom core board until student obtains an AAC system
- Troubleshoot other barriers to availability with your team

Also remember that under IDEA, students have a right to take district owned AAC devices home. The parent simply needs to sign a form. Any accessories needed (case, strap) for a student to carry their device can be ordered from the district. The AT consultant can be contacted to help with both of these issues. Finally, here is [one family's perspective](#) on using AAC all day long.



Modeling - Speak AAC

Modeling AAC is parallel to speaking a foreign language. If we want students to use AAC to communicate, we must model how to do that. Modeling use of AAC is called Aided Language Stimulation (ALS). It requires becoming familiar with each student's system and using those devices to communicate with them. Here's how to do it:

- Identify potential target vocab within specified activities/concepts (*see the Core Word Classroom and Communication Opportunities sections for more information*).
- Model:
 - *Don't worry about mistakes* - this models resilience and normalizes mistakes. You can use self-talk to model what you are doing, e.g., "I'm looking for GO. Where is that word? This is hard, but I'm gonna keep looking."
 - *Start small* - select a specific time and word(s) when you will focus on modeling. Increase these times as you get better at modeling
 - *Involve other students/peers* - know a speaking student who is interested in your student? Encourage them to model, too!
 - *Don't expect a response* - think of modeling as input for receptive language.
 - *Give wait time* - Although we don't expect a response, WAIT TIME is CRUCIAL. Give an expectant pause to allow the student to talk if they want to.
 - *Stick to the key words you are focusing on* - don't try to model every word in your sentences. For example, if you are working on GO, point to GO while saying, "It's time to go to lunch."
 - *Model one step beyond what the student is communicating.*
 - Focus on taking turns/exchanging messages rather than asking/answering questions "correctly." Student focusing on responding to a signal of expectation.
 - Routine-oriented language tasks will help build symbolic awareness and create shared symbols between communication partners. Utilize simple scripts within routines so that staff consistently model same vocabulary and sentence types.
 - Communication partners should give feedback on effectiveness of communication attempts as well as provide expansion and/or recasts of the response (Correct an error or provide next linguistic step).
 - Partner should ask- am I modeling a range of communicative intents? ...Different types of messages? ...Using the system to interact, have a conversation? ...Strategies for when I make a mistake, or I am not understood?



Communication Opportunities - Give your students a chance to use their voice

Students should be given at least 200 opportunities per day to talk. This includes modeling followed by an expectant pause. Plan for how much prompting may be needed to support a student's expressive language and consider the communicative functions within the student's repertoire. Don't expect the student to use the words right away, this is why we take time to model. Do give the student a chance to take their conversational turn. Don't test the student, that is, don't ask them "show me ___". Do ask them open-ended questions and preference based questions, e.g., "what did you see at the field trip?" or "Did you like going to the zoo?". Use expectant pause and natural cues to indicate that it is their turn to talk.

Essentially, when working with AAC users, provide the same kind of language learning environment that you provide to verbal children:

- Models of the expected communication modality being used in meaningful contexts
- Scaffolding provided to support student communication
- Natural feedback/responses for student communication
- Expansions, recasts, and revisions using the student's communication modality

Tips and Tricks for Eliciting Communication

- CAR: Comment, Await participation, Respond (Cole, Maddox, Lim, Notari-Syverson, 2002)
 - *Comment*: Make a comment relevant to your activity while modeling
 - "I like going to the zoo!" (modeling LIKE and GO)
 - *Await response*: Count to 10 (at least!) and wait for student's response
 - If no response:
 - Take their turn starting with "I think" or "Maybe"
 - "I think you don't like going to the zoo at all!" (model NOT, LIKE, GO)
 - If ambiguous response
 - Take their turn and give meaning to their behavior
 - "You turned your head, I think that means you don't like going to the zoo." (model NOT, LIKE, GO)
 - If they selected a word that seems random:
 - Behave as if it were intentional
 - "You think this is silly? Me too" (model SILLY)
 - If they respond:
 - Respond back adding more to what they said



- Student selects LIKE
- “You like it, too. I also like going to the park.” (model LIKE and GO)
- **RAAP:** Read, Ask, Answer, Prompt (Binger, Kent-Walsh, Berens, Del Campo, Rvera, 2008)
 - *Read:* and Model 2 symbols using communication system
 - *Ask:* and Model 2 symbols using communication system
 - *Answer:* and model 2 symbols using communication system
 - *Prompt:* using AAC system using prompting hierarchy least-to-most cuing

Data Collection

Data will help you know if your interventions are working. The difference with AAC is that you may need to collect data on your student, your staff, and yourself.

- *Collect Data on Student Use:* data for the student can be on mean length of utterance, syntactic structure, number/type of communicative functions used, IEP goals, what core words they have mastered. Etc.
- *Collect Data on Staff Use:* Have staff track their use/modeling of devices/systems. Are they modeling? How often? In what contexts? Set up an AAC challenge to motivate staff to carry and use AAC displays.
- *Collect Data on Yourself:* Are you modeling with students? How are students responding to your lessons? What words have you taught?



References:

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