

Ability Level Continuum*

Use this guide to help provide insight to current and potential target skills and strengths. Mark the statements that best describes an individual's observable communication behaviors. You may not check all of the boxes in any skill area. You may also find that you check boxes in more than one Ability Level.

Ability Level 1: Emergent		Ability Level 2: Emergent Transitional	
Understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited or no understanding that symbols (e.g., pictures, words) represent ideas. <input type="checkbox"/> Pictures may or may not help increase understanding and expression. <input type="checkbox"/> Difficult to determine how much he/she understands verbally.	Understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Responds to common gestures (e.g., come here, go away, greetings). <input type="checkbox"/> Shows understanding of the use of common objects. <input type="checkbox"/> Pictures seem to help increase both understanding and expression. <input type="checkbox"/> May be starting to follow simple directions within familiar routines and activities.
Expression	<input type="checkbox"/> May communicate most successfully using facial expression, body language, gestures, and/or behavior (either socially appropriate or challenging). <input type="checkbox"/> May indicate acceptance (e.g., smile) or rejection (e.g., turn away) but does not reliably answer other yes/no questions. <input type="checkbox"/> May desire or try to communicate in familiar and motivating activities. <input type="checkbox"/> Requires help from communication partner to communicate successfully (e.g., narrowing choices, interpreting gestures/body language/behavior). <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory behavior is very important for calming (e.g., rocking, mouthing objects) and determining likes and dislikes.	Expression	<input type="checkbox"/> Understands symbols (e.g., objects, pictures) for basic, common or concrete items. <input type="checkbox"/> Starting to use clear and simple symbols (including objects, photographs and picture symbols) in motivating situations or favorite activities. <input type="checkbox"/> If using picture symbols, he/she will use one picture at a time to communicate messages. <input type="checkbox"/> May use gestures, body language, facial expression or behavior intentionally to communicate (e.g., pointing, showing, giving); however, reliability varies from day to day or activity to activity.
Social Interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Reacts to familiar people and/or motivating activities. <input type="checkbox"/> Takes turns in familiar and motivating routines (e.g., "high five" or when someone spreads arms to receive a hug). <input type="checkbox"/> May respond to close physical interaction by looking, smiling, or reaching.	Social Interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Shows clear preference for certain objects, activities, and people. <input type="checkbox"/> May be starting to show some interest in social interactions, especially in specific situations. <input type="checkbox"/> May not use symbols to interact socially.
Literacy Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> May not be interested in reading or book activities.	Literacy Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> May demonstrate a beginning interest in participating in shared reading and/or is beginning to engage with books more independently. <input type="checkbox"/> May be able to identify own name and a few other frequently seen words.
Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Performance with forms of AAC may be inconsistent. <input type="checkbox"/> Benefits from help from his/her communication partner as skills are developing.	Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Performance with forms of AAC may be inconsistent. <input type="checkbox"/> Benefits from help from his/her communication partner as skills are developing.

*Adapted from Patricia Dowden, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, University of Washington, Communicative Independence Model.

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Ability Level 3: Context-Dependent		Ability Level 4: Transitional Independent	
	Understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Understands photographs or picture symbols representing objects, common actions (e.g., run, paint, eat), people or situations. <input type="checkbox"/> Starting to understand more abstract picture symbols (e.g., think, big, hot, few). <input type="checkbox"/> Follows simple instructions in both familiar and unfamiliar routines. <input type="checkbox"/> Understands and follows general conversations. 		Understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Understands conversations as well as same age peers. <input type="checkbox"/> Follows simple to complex directions given verbally.
	Expression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a combination of communication methods to express messages (e.g., gestures/pointing, symbols, speech/vocalizations, and device). <input type="checkbox"/> Uses symbols and objects spontaneously to communicate basic needs and make a variety of requests. <input type="checkbox"/> Beginning to use symbols to comment and/or ask questions with support. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicates best in routines, about familiar topics, and with familiar communication partners. <input type="checkbox"/> Beginning to combine two or more symbols to create longer messages (e.g., uses carrier phrases "I want; I like; I see ____"). 		Expression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Communicates about a broad range of topics with both familiar and unfamiliar communication partners. <input type="checkbox"/> Consistently combines 2 or more symbols to create longer, more complex and/or an increased variety of messages for different communicative functions (e.g., comments, questions, or sharing information). <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a wider variety of vocabulary or communication tools within his/her communication device.
	Social Interaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Initiates conversations and social interactions with familiar communication partners. <input type="checkbox"/> Benefits from help to take additional turns in conversation. <input type="checkbox"/> Answers routine questions appropriately with familiar communication partners. 		Social Interaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Uses socially appropriate comments/questions to initiate with familiar communication partners. <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriately answers routine questions with a variety of communication partners.
	Literacy Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Literacy skills growing to include: identifying letters of the alphabet, connecting some letters with corresponding sounds, understanding word boundaries, reading a small number of high frequency sight words, reading and writing name, beginning to spell words but not necessarily with conventional spelling. 		Literacy Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Literacy skills growing to include: increased letter-sound awareness, additional sight words, conventional spelling of simple words; adding word endings as appropriate (e.g., past tense "ed", plural "s" or "ing), and solid understanding of the connection between spoken words and print. <input type="checkbox"/> May be beginning to utilize word prediction with symbol support. <input type="checkbox"/> Reads printed material that is somewhat below an age-appropriate level.
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> May continue to benefit from the help of his/her communication partner to communicate successfully, especially when the topic, partner or environment is unfamiliar. <input type="checkbox"/> Able to use simple strategies (e.g., repeat) to repair communication when not understood with support from the communication partner. 		Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Strong "mental mapping" of where things are in his/her device including navigational symbols. <input type="checkbox"/> Able to use a variety of strategies to repair communication when not understood; and, in some cases, with the support of communication partners. <input type="checkbox"/> Programs content in the communication device when it's desired or missing given support as needed (e.g., add favorite foods in Word List food category). 	

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Ability Level 5: Independent	
Understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Understands communication and directions the same as same-age peers.
Expression	<input type="checkbox"/> Combines single words, spelling and phrases together to communicate about a variety of subjects as others would at his/her age. <input type="checkbox"/> Able to expand on a thought in conversation.
Social Interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Social interaction skills, environments, and activities are similar to other of his/her age.
Literacy Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Literacy abilities are on par with same-age peers.
Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Able to use various strategies to repair communication when he/she is not understood. <input type="checkbox"/> Able to utilize rate enhancement features of the device (e.g., word prediction) though he/she may not choose to do so. <input type="checkbox"/> Able to program desired content (e.g., personal narratives, etc.) into device.

Notes: Additional observations of communication characteristics in each skill area such as strengths, barriers, other communication modes, etc.

Understanding
Expression
Social Interaction
Literacy Skills
Other: (e.g., environment, favorite communication partner/s, motivating activities/topics, behavior, etc.)

ABILITY LEVEL SUMMARY

In the chart below, mark the individual's Ability Level for each skill area to provide you with a "big picture" view.

SKILLS	ABILITY LEVEL					Notes:
	Emergent	Emergent Transitional	Context-Dependent	Transitional Independent	Independent	
Understanding						
Expression						
Social Interaction						
Literacy Skills						
Other						