

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are core words?

Core words are a small set of basic frequently used words that can be combined to create unique messages. The core strategy systematically introduces words, so the user has an appropriate and manageable number of words that increase at subsequent steps, while not changing position as the vocabulary set grows.

2. What is Core First Learning?

Core First Learning is a predictable approach that helps students find, read, and use core words. Research shows that 85% of the words exchanged in everyday communication derive from a relatively small bank of approximately 300 words. By providing systematic instruction in these words, we give them increased power as communicators and an opportunity to develop their literacy skills at the same time.

3. How does Core First Learning work?

The instructional routines, found in the Quick Lesson Guide, occur across five days and were developed to provide structured opportunities for users to practice using the Core words both in language and literacy activities. Books were created specifically with a Core strategy in mind and maximize use of the target words in connected texts that support comprehension and engagement. Activities are intended for classrooms, therapy, or home use. Each word unit comes with word-by-word Lesson Plans, so you know what to do to get started on Monday morning!

4. Can I change the order of the words I teach?

Absolutely! Since you are the expert on your student and his or her needs, you are free to adjust the order of the words based on prior learning, classroom curriculum, specific motivations, etc. We've provided an order as indicated by research, but feel free to customize your instruction in ways that best suit the needs of your learners.

5. How do I collect data and demonstrate student progress?

There are several ways to do this. First, you'll want to review the Assessments folder before beginning each set. There, you can use multiple-choice assessment activities as a pre-test, a post-test, or both. Another way to collect data in an ongoing way is to print out the results of individual activities. It particularly applies to writing activities. Lastly, by selecting "students" within the Student Management Center, you can track performance and match activities or lessons to your students' goals. These methodologies together can provide you with a robust way to determine student growth.

6. Can I edit the activities?

Core First Learning activities, like all Boardmaker Instructional Solutions activities, cannot be opened in the editor like regular Boardmaker activities. However, many of the activities do include some settings to adjust how the activity looks or plays. For example, all the Book activities include settings to change the font, text color, and text background color. Access these settings through Settings>Activity Settings.

7. Do I have to use the Lesson Plans exactly as it they are written?

Not at all! The script is something of a default. It provides you with a step-by-step methodology for conducting these lessons. The approach is predictable and simple enough that you'll quickly develop a sense of how to personalize this approach. Once you've navigated a week or two, you probably won't consult the script at all. At that point, the Quick Lesson Guide will provide you with the critical information you need to make these lessons your own.

8. What's the difference between a Quick Lesson Guide and Lesson Plans?

With the Lessons Plans, our intent was that you could provide instruction without previous knowledge of a Core strategy. These are more relevant as you get started, and/or as you transfer or share instructional responsibilities with other team members. As you get more comfortable and start to learn the "ins-and-outs" of this program, including realizing the predictable routines, you might benefit from the Quick Lesson Guide. It provides a nutshell overview of the week without the lengthy text, scripts, or activity descriptions.

9. How important are the Supplemental Activities?

At the end of each word unit, you'll find Supplemental Activities. These are optional, and the intent was to offer additional ways to engage students in exploring and using the target words. They provide additional practice at school, at home, or both. As with many other parts of our program, feel free to customize the activity to your student or learning environment.

10. Are there any print components included in this program?

You bet! At the highest level of your folder structure, spend some time browsing the print communication boards we've provided so that you can post core words around your environment. Additionally, you'll find flashcards, bingo, and a print version of each book in every word folder.

11. What is a picture walk?

The idea behind the picture walk activity is to create a rich language experience that draws the student in and gives them a chance to connect with the images in the book before experiencing the text. It helps them make predictions, gather information, and develop comprehension skills in line with the today's College and Career Readiness Standards. It supports learners in engaging in a book experience beyond just reading the text. For each person reading, it will be different and include

personal connections and background knowledge. In the beginning, these picture walks will be largely (or entirely) crafted by the educator or parent co-reading the book.

- First, we model "noticing" something about the image. Use your speech and produce keywords using the student's AAC system (e.g., colors, letters, names of objects/people, etc.) or sentences. It gives the student an example of how he/she can communicate.
- Then, we reinforce the contributions they make. Maybe there is a picture of a balloon in the background that just slipped past its owner's hand. You might say, "Oh look! That balloon is getting away. That reminds me of the balloons we released on the playground last week after our celebration for the new slide!"
- Lastly, it's not just about the text. Don't expect your student to repeat what you've said, contribute more, or answer questions about the things you've "noticed" together - just let it be a mutually enjoyable time of experiencing the book and illustrations together. As time goes on, you'll find that your learner might start to "notice" some things with less support from you, or even independently. That's great! We know you'll find that this picture walk activity will be a beneficial tool when introducing core words and during other literacy activities as well.

12. What can I do to make sure my student is retaining knowledge of previously introduced words?

There are many and varied ways to reinforce core word learning. Many of the activities, like Matching, Bingo, and Flashcards provide these built-in opportunities for reinforcement. Also, feel free to revisit or replay favorite Supplemental Activities from previous units. Varied repetition allows students to learn these words and use them across contexts. Lastly, Core First Learning includes a minimum of 36 weeks of instruction. We call this a minimum because most students benefit from periodic review.

13. I have another idea for writing a book using the target word. Can I replace your suggestion?

Yes! We love it when an instructor or clinician can use knowledge of their student and curriculum to adjust the lessons. You can create books with the many fun book templates contained within Boardmaker Online.

14. How can I get my student's family or other educators involved in this work?

We've tried to build this in for you with the parent letter, the Quick Lesson Guide for home use, as well as the Supplemental Activities. You'll notice that a lot of the lessons provide daily practice with going home and sharing with family. We hope this will strengthen the home-to-school connection. We recognize that in certain circumstances, it may not be possible for parents to take an active role in supporting a child. We encourage you to think creatively about this barrier. Consider having another instructor or professional spend a few minutes with the student at the end of the school day, or come up with a creative solution with your student (e.g., perhaps a neighbor or family friend, could

help). It's not always easy to navigate difficult family dynamics, but the hope is that your student will have practice outside of just the traditional teaching session.

15. What can I do to support my student in learning these words using TobiiDynavox device?

There are several things you can do. First, you'll want to respond to all forms of communication. Think about how many ways you communicate in a day- gestures, facial expressions, written expression, verbal expression, and more. Your student will do the same thing. If they say something verbally, and you understand it, don't require that they replicate it using the system. If they say something using the device, it doesn't make sense to have them verbally repeat it. Remember that co-construction, or helping your student build the messages they want to express, is an important component of learning how to communicate. Just as we do with kids using natural speech, provide expansion on what the student communicates and offer a model without the requirement to imitate you. Don't forget to provide wait time. A quiet pause allows your student to process, plan, and respond. You will be amazed at what they can do if you only give them enough time to do it. Finally, the one strategy you'll find to be incredibly helpful is to provide your student with partner augmented input, or aided language stimulation. Use the system in front of them as a model. It's incredible what happens when you do!

16. What if my student does not use a TobiiDynavox device?

It's not a problem! Look in the folder labeled, 'Digitized Device Overlays' and you'll see a range of grid configurations for many of the most popular devices on the market. If your student uses low-tech supports, then print out the Core Word Boards found in a folder labeled, 'Print Communication Boards.'" We strive to make sure that every student, regardless of the communication solution they are using, is successful.

17. Why are so many of the activities not supported by symbols?

You won't see symbols in many of the activities contained in this program since most abstract concepts (and therefore Core words), are difficult to represent with a symbol. Instead of providing one that a student must learn to associate with the word, the word itself becomes the symbol. It gives the added benefit of helping students develop a knowledge bank of useful sight words.

18. How do I differentiate my instruction?

The majority of activities are accessible, physically and cognitively, just as they are; yet we do provide differentiated support for writing since research shows this activity is particularly challenging. We provide three levels of writing support. Since the goal of learning to write is to compose meaningful texts independently, use these supports as a progression. Match your student to the level where he or she can be most successful, with an eye toward increasing confidence and independence over time. Use the table below to find the right, beginning match for your student:

Level/Tier	Description	User
Maximal Support	Typically, students have 3-5 opportunities to create sentences or complete phrases. The student moves linearly through these options until the composition is complete.	For students who: Have limited exposure to writing Have limited or no experience with writing instruction Have little or no previous understanding of self as a writer Have little or no experience generating print independently Have the most significant barriers to mainstream curricular materials
Moderate Support	Students select a sentence starter and finish it by selecting one word or phrase from the handful that provided (1-4 options). There are 3-5 starters per activity. There is an implied but not a fixed order in which to create sentences.	For students who: Have a very beginning identify of self as a writer Have some beginning phonemic awareness Have some beginning phonological awareness Have some experience understanding functions of print Have demonstrated some interest or initiative in generating print Have some barriers to mainstream curriculum
Minimal Support	Students generate thoughts independently, using the keyboard, word prediction, or a built-in scaffold that is consists of a collection of 9 starter phrases and a 16-word, topic specific word bank. Supportive features include word morphing, read-back text, and punctuation buttons.	For students who Have some experience/success as a writer Have some knowledge of beginning writing genres Have some experience with beginning conventional writing instruction Have some independence and initiative as a writer Have some beginning conventional phonological knowledge Have some barriers to mainstream curriculum