

Communication Inventory for Emergent Language Learners



Determining appropriate instructional goals to increase social communication is one of the most important aspects of an educational program for a student with autism. Using existing data and prior knowledge of the student, the Communication Inventory for Emergent Language Learners helps educators to quickly identify priority areas for expansion of communication skills so instruction may begin immediately.

Intended Use ● The Inventory is designed for students who are beginning or emergent communicators. This can include students who are non-speaking, use some spoken language, have limited proficiency with AAC, or are developing early communication skills.

Because it does not require the collection of new data, the Inventory can be completed informally at any time. It is not a replacement for formal evaluations or used to determine eligibility for services. Instead, it organizes what the team already knows to guide communication instruction throughout the student's educational career.

Skills Addressed ● The Inventory focuses on functional communication skills, starting with basic abilities and progressing to more complex ones. It includes receptive and expressive language skills, which support self-determination and independence across settings. The Inventory is based on resources by Kleiman (2003), Mattes (2006), and Rowland (2011).

Completion and Use ● The student's IEP team should complete the Inventory. A team approach ensures accuracy and input from those who work with the student in different settings. At least one team member must understand the purpose and functions of communication.

The Inventory contains two sections which address a variety of social communication skills, including the *manner* and *context* in which a student communicates for various purposes. To obtain a comprehensive profile of the student's communication abilities, both sections of the Inventory should be completed. The IEP team should consider the student's skills across environments—classroom, home, and community—using observations and existing data. If additional information is needed to develop communication-focused IEP goals, formal or informal assessments may be needed, including curriculum-based assessments, interviews, and/or data collection. Remember, gathering new data to determine IEP goals is an evaluation and requires parent/guardian consent.

Section I

Student Name: _____ Date Completed: _____

Team Member Names: _____

Instructions: Using what the team already knows about the student:

- Place an **X** in the box(es) that best indicates how the student currently demonstrates each skill.
- Students may use more than one communication method—mark all that apply.
- Only mark a skill if the student demonstrates it effectively and independently.
- Leave boxes blank if the student does not use a method consistently or effectively.
- Use the last column if the student uses interfering behaviors (e.g., hitting, crying, grabbing) to communicate.
- After completing the inventory, review and mark Priority Level (1-5) in the first column.

PRIORITY LEVEL:	THE STUDENT:	Uses gestures and/or points	Uses sign language	Uses AAC: pictures/ icons	Uses AAC: speech generating device	Uses verbalizations and/or word approximation	Uses spoken words	Uses sentences	Uses interfering behaviors
	Chooses an item when presented with 2 items								
	Chooses an item when presented with 3 or more items								
	Indicates that they want an object/ action when it is being offered								
	Rejects/refuses an item or action								
	Gets a person's attention								
	Indicates the desire to stop an activity								
	Asks to continue an activity								
	Asks for an object/action when it is being used by another person								
	Asks for an object/activity when it is in sight								
	Indicates an object/action when asked, "What do you want?"								
	Asks for an object/activity when it is out of sight								
	Asks for help								
	Labels someone else's actions								
	Labels an object when it is in sight								
	Greets or says goodbye to a person								
	Shows an item to a person								
	Asks for information								
	Answers "wh" questions during interactions								
	Answers "wh" questions about a story								
	Tells a familiar story								
	Responds to someone else's story or information with a comment or question								

Section II

Instructions: Using what the team already knows about the student:

- Place an **X** in the box if it describes how the student demonstrates the skill.
- If it does not apply, leave the box blank.
- Work across the top row first, then move down to the next skill.
- Multiple boxes may be marked in each row, since these areas do not always build on one another.
- The yellow, blue, and green shaded areas indicate the context in which the student completes the tasks listed in the left-hand column.
- Only mark a skill if the student demonstrates it effectively and independently.
- After completing the inventory, review and mark Priority Level (1-5) in the first column.

		Instructional Delivery				Instructional Context			Instructional Familiarity	
PRIORITY LEVEL:	THE STUDENT:	When given verbal instructions	When given a model cue	When given a picture cue	When given written instruction	When presented 1:1 to the student	When presented in a small group	When presented in a large group	When instruction is part of a routine	When instruction is not part of a routine
	Stops an activity when asked									
	Attends to another person when asked									
	Accepts an item									
	Refuses an item									
	Labels items									
	Labels actions									
	Follows one step directions									
	Follows two step directions									
	Follows instructions containing spatial concepts (e.g., in, on, under, over, etc.)									
	Follows instructions containing sequencing concepts (e.g., first, next, last, etc.)									

Using Inventory Results ● After completing and reviewing the Inventory, the IEP team should evaluate whether sufficient information is available to begin instruction.

If gaps are identified:

- Clarify which skill areas or domains require additional data.
- Determine whether formal assessment is necessary; if so, obtain parent/guardian consent.
- Assign appropriate team members to conduct the assessment.
- Schedule a follow-up meeting to review the results and make informed decisions about instructional planning.

If Inventory data is sufficient:

- Select appropriate instructional strategies and draft communication goals.
- Identify needed resources and where to access them.
- Consider reinforcers or potential reinforcers to support skill acquisition.

Selecting Communication Skills for Instruction ●

Because the skills listed in the Inventory generally progress from foundational to more complex, priority should be given to any skills the student does not demonstrate consistently, particularly those that appear earlier in the Inventory.

Use the following questions to identify which communication skills to target:

- Which foundational skills are not yet used consistently or independently?
- Is the skill used ineffectively or only understood by a few people?
- Does the student use interfering behaviors instead of the skill?
- Is the skill not demonstrated in any modality?
- Would improving the skill increase independence and meaningful participation?

Consider Communication Modalities:

Is the student's current communication method sufficient to demonstrate all of the targeted skills across contexts? If not, the IEP team should explore additional or alternative communication supports. Refer to the [Virginia Assistive Technology, Tools, and Strategies \(VATTS\) Resources](#) to guide the team through the consideration and documentation process.

References ●

- Kleiman, L. I. (2003). The Functional Communication Profile – Revised: Assessing Communication Effectiveness in Clients with Developmental Delays, LinguiSystems, Inc.: East Moline, IL.
- Mattes, L. J. (2006). Functional Language Assessment and Intervention Sourcebook, Academic Communication Associates: Oceanside, CA.
- Rowland, C. (2011). Communication Matrix. September 23, 2025, from www.communicationmatrix.org.