

Introduction to AAC

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Foreword

You are invited to join an AAC literary adventure of insights and experiences that will shape your perspectives from hundreds of researchers and interventionists, including this author, Dr. Lesley Mayne. She describes to readers the importance of strategies that support people with complex communication profiles and their communication partners! She starts with her own questions, respects the research of authentic communication, and expands the horizons of communication sciences. Her courage, energy, and everyday actions motivate and move communication partners to implement communication in naturally occurring events. Throughout this book, she invites the reader to engage in opportunities to think, reflect, seek thoughtful answers, and plan actions for immediate use. Changing hearts and minds over time is encouraged and expected. Accepting what is possible in the experience of expressing and developing language is the goal! What a gift!

Dr. Mayne recognizes that people need access to expressing their own experiences. Their communication partners listen and respond genuinely, attributing meaning to what they see and hear. She laughs at her own missteps and encourages professionals to do the same. That way, she lets go of false claims and finds new meaning in people's expression of interests through communication. She sees the harmony of teaching and learning with each person as critical for thinking as participation occurs. This book invites the learner to listen to experiences and interpretations of parents and partners, as they are the everyday and most meaningful communication partners. She honors the field of speech-language pathology and related professionals, educators, administrators, paraeducators, peers, and families whose very jobs and mastery depend upon integration of learning and teaching, including tools that make reading and writing a part of communication.

Above all, she believes and acts upon the insight that communication influences participation and the sense of belonging for the good of people using AAC and all of us. When the author, a graduate student intern, was first assigned to me as her clinical supervisor, I asked, *What do you know about AAC?* One simple question sparked more than 30 years of collaboration on a book, presentations, and webinars. I thought we had accomplished much by writing *Augmentative and Assistive Technology: A Protocol and Intervention Plan to Support Children With Complex Communication Profiles* (Mayne & Rogers, 2020). However, she recognized the next question: How do we support people who are just getting started with their education and/or working with people with complex profiles in learning about AAC? Her response to that question is this book. While teaching and learning at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, she acted upon insights in extended research. May each reader soon experience how this wise, experienced, and creative author teaches us to be amazing communication partners of people with complex communication profiles.

Sharon M. Rogers, PhD, CCC-SLP

Preface

Purpose

The purpose of this book is to introduce the learner to the knowledge and skills in augmentative and assistive communication (AAC) that support people across the lifespan as related to the cultures in which they live and people with whom they interact. Learners build their knowledge and skill base with the person using AAC. Communication partners are at the forefront, from family and friends to those who are known and less familiar in the community. This book serves as an AAC resource for learners who may be professionals, graduate or undergraduate students, speech-language pathology assistants, and related paraprofessionals. The conceptual knowledge is rooted in the research; AAC skills are rooted in practice opportunities in which the learner may design, contemplate, implement, observe, trial, and actively engage with clinical thinking. Ultimately, the aim of this book is to connect people through meaningful multimodal communication.

Chapter Features

1. **Design elements:** The chapters are designed to engage the learner in reading, thinking, and doing. Learners are no longer passive participants in the classroom, and texts should follow suit. Therefore, engagement activities are embedded within the text. The activities shape active learning and bridge concepts to skills that may be implemented in practice. The concepts that drive the chapter content are based on more than 500 references from authors and researchers in AAC and related fields.

2. **Learning objectives:** The introduction to each chapter starts with a *Perspective* that orients the learner with a brief scope of the chapter, followed by the *Learning Objectives*. This placement of the learning objectives allows the learner to utilize the foundational introductory content to place their attention, organize their thinking, and plan note taking. For an overview of each chapter, see the end of this preface.
3. **Pedagogical features:** There are numerous ways for learners to be engaged with the text beyond reading. Look to the *Mindful Minute*, *Reflection*, and *Integration Tasks* for these opportunities embedded in the chapters. See the ancillary material on the *PluralPlus Companion Website* for selected in-chapter activities and additional activities and resources for students and professors.
 - a. **Mindful Minute:** The *Mindful Minute* engagement tasks ask the learner to act upon the concepts by practicing or thinking about what they read. These opportunities generate action and provide a different way for learners to cognitively engage with the concepts in addition to reading. Professors may use the tasks to guide discussion or coursework for residential or online classes.
 - b. **Reflections:** The *Reflection* tasks allow readers to think about their experiences, activate background knowledge, or consider concepts as they may be new or offer a different perspective. Like the *Mindful Minute*, a moment to pause during the act of reading will support students in assimilating knowledge that may be new or may expand perspectives and experiences.
 - c. **Case studies:** There are many mini-case studies threaded throughout the book. The case studies embed and draw from concepts that serve as active planning and problem solving. The mini-case studies, consistent with the *Mindful Minute* and *Reflection* opportunities, enable the learner to put their ideas into action.
 - d. **QR Codes:** Throughout each chapter there are QR codes that link students to videos, websites, and resources. Each code provides the learner with access to additional information about chapter topics that can be used for exploratory and discussion purposes.
 - e. **Integration tasks:** The chapter questions in this book are titled *Integration Tasks*. They are purposefully placed before the chapter *Conclusion*. If the idea is for the learner to engage with learning outcomes, then they

should have the opportunity to integrate their learning before the chapter conclusion so that their experiences are drawn through their natural end. The *Integration Tasks* consist of (a) five traditional declarative knowledge questions titled the *Concept Check*, (b) two or more *Application Tasks* that ask what the reader what they would do in a given situation, and (c) two *For Thought...* scenarios that invite the reader to consider perspectives or harness their new knowledge.

- f. **Glossary:** Access the glossary for definitions and explanations of terms, often bolded in the text. The terminology included in the glossary represents specialized or technical terms used or related to AAC.

Companion Website

A visit to the *Introduction to AAC PluralPlus Companion Website* will offer selected *Mindful Minute* and *Reflection* tasks and every chapter *Integration Task* so learners may complete them for coursework. Professors may opt for students to submit completed *Mindful Minute*, *Reflection*, and *Integration Tasks*. Professors have access to *Integration Tasks with Answers* for the quantitative questions, as well as additional course activities that complement concepts across chapters. A midterm and sample final exam are offered in addition to a sample course calendar.

AAC Chapters Overview

Welcome to the chapter overview! In Chapter 1, answer the question, *What is AAC?* by investigating the *nuts and bolts* of AAC and how it relates to assistive technology (AT). Answering this question helps you formulate an answer to family and friends who may ask, *You're studying what?* Before we narrow the scope of AAC in subsequent chapters, explore how AAC fits within the scope of the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health with Child and Youth (WHO-ICF, 2006). Become oriented to the AAC 10 Rules of Commitment by Dr. Katya Hill, ASHA Fellow (2016), that offer an AAC charge.

In Chapter 2, learn how to approach AAC assessment and intervention through a communication architectural plan based on Dr. Janice Light's AAC purposes (1988) and competencies (1989),

updated in 2014 (Light & McNaughton), as they relate to cultural responsiveness (Hamilton et al., 2020; Wyatt, 2012). Chapter 3 investigates multimodal communication that encompasses nonverbal and no-, low-, mid-, and high-tech AAC methods as well as access methods. Learn about AAC assessment in Chapter 4, including the steps, culturally responsive assessment, and how to read and interpret sections of an AAC report given mini-case studies aimed to anchor knowledge and skills. Before heading into intervention, it is important to explore the topics of Chapter 5 that address common questions and myths people may have about AAC. Then, equipped with a common ground rooted in an understanding of assessment, answers to common questions, and myths, complete feature matching technology to the person, informed by communication partners.

With foundational knowledge in check, dive into AAC intervention in Chapter 6, where vocabulary planning and selection are explored. Discover the role that perspective plays in selecting vocabulary and how structured and unstructured observation supports core and fringe vocabulary planning and selection in Chapter 6. With vocabulary selected, Chapter 7 will discuss five different approaches to implement vocabulary. Moving on, what fundamental information do you need to *know before you go* into AAC intervention? That question is answered in Chapter 8, in addition to the thinking and doing of key AAC interventions in action. Chapter 9 reviews ways to integrate language strategies in AAC intervention, focusing on the domains of language and gestalt language processing. Can literacy be threaded into AAC intervention and supported by communication partners? Absolutely! Learn about opportunities to integrate literacy, the ability to read and write in a given language, in Chapter 10.

Culturally responsive practices in AAC are threaded throughout the chapters, and Chapter 11 focuses specifically on the topic, addressing training approaches, key terms, progress and disparity in culturally relevant practices and technology, and insights into culturally responsive AAC purposes and competencies. In Chapter 12, we learn that our communication partners can be anyone. However, not all communication partners are equal without knowledge and skills in communicating with a person who uses AAC.

With all the AAC skills and knowledge gained in Chapters 1 to 12, we are primed for Chapter 13, in which we learn to read and write goals and objectives. It is important to understand what Chapters 1 to 12 offer: (a) our objectives learned from assessment and (b) the scope of intervention options to design AAC goals. Goals drive intervention. Our last adventure, Chapter 14, considers a path for AAC intervention session design. Visit a framework that can be

easily adapted for any session. Follow a case study that walks the learner through session design, both asking and answering questions to guide the reader. Chapter 14 ends where Chapter 1 started, asking the learner to revisit the AAC 10 Rules of Commitment (Hill, 2016) to consider the difference they will make in the lives of those who use AAC and their communication partners due to the honor of having successfully connected people through AAC.

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About the Author



Lesley Mayne is an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire (UWEC) in the Speech-Language and Hearing Sciences (SLHS) department, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate students in AAC and speech sound disorders. Her research specialties are in her teaching areas of autism spectrum disorders and pedagogy. Her practical clinical experience stems across the lifespan and allows her to bring authentic applications to her students. Teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level means her students are active learners and members of her research teams to guide the next generation of SLPAs, SLPs, professors, and researchers, which is consistent with the SLHS faculty at UWEC. In addition to *Introduction to AAC* (Plural Publishing, 2025), she co-authored *AAC for Children With Complex Communication Profiles* with Dr. Sharon Rogers (Routledge, 2020) and the first and second editions of *Let's Talk Social Skills* (Routledge, 2019).

CHAPTER 1

Multimodal Communication: The Nuts and Bolts of AAC



My turn.

“This child can discuss anything, just the way it’s being communicated looks different.”

—Preservice teacher observation of a child using AAC (Mayne et al., 2023)

Perspective

What do you know and what do you think you know about AAC? This question was posed to students enrolled in an undergraduate AAC course in the first week of instruction. Most of the students had limited to some knowledge or experience. They expressed that (a) AAC can be used for communication, (b) it is a form of technology, (c) there are many types of AAC technology, and (d) it helps with language. Good start! Read one student’s precourse remarks:

I do not know much about AAC. I remember briefly learning about the benefits to them and how they can help children and adults who have language difficulties. I also have experience with someone using an AAC device around me. Watching him use the device was very interesting and I wanted to take this course to get myself more educated on AAC devices and how important they are!

We are all on a spectrum of awareness, knowledge, and skills in AAC. Take a moment to reflect on your current knowledge and experiences in AAC.

Reflection

What does the term AAC mean to you? Reflect on experiences you have had with AAC. Perhaps you have observed someone using nonverbal communication such as sign language or gestures. Have you seen anyone use an AAC device before, whether someone you know or someone you have observed in the community or another context?

As you progress through the chapters of this book, you will learn that there are no prerequisites to using AAC. Similarly, there are also no prerequisites to learning about AAC. Time to get started!



Dog wearing goggles looking out of a car window. Source: Annette Shaff/Shutterstock.com

Your perspective of what AAC constitutes is important. Continue to grow your perspective about what AAC means to you and about people who use AAC, their families and close communication partners, professionals, paraprofessionals, and the broader community as you read, engage in the activities, and put principles into practice. While you do so, focus on the communicative exchange and connection between people and within their cultures, the intent of their messages, and the modalities (e.g., nonverbal, verbal speech, low tech, high tech) wrapped up in the acronym AAC. We're on our way!

Learning Objectives

- Summarize what constitutes culturally responsive practices in AAC.
- Explain how communication, language, and AAC are inter-related terms.
- Define terms: nonverbal, vocal, word approximations, verbalizations, multimodal AAC.
- Describe the purposes and contexts of communicating with AAC.
- Compare and contrast AAC technology and assistive technology (AT).

Hold On...What Is AAC?

Communication is an exchange of information that fosters a connection between people. The words **augmentative** and **alternative** or **augmentative and assistive communication** (AAC) represent **multimodal** (or many ways or means) communication is learned, understood, and expressed for people with limited or no oral-verbal speech. People often refer to individual forms of communication as **modalities** such as nonverbal, vocal, verbal, low-, mid-, and high-technology or “tech.” AAC is defined as an area of research and of clinical and educational practice that attempts to study and, when necessary, compensate for temporary or permanent impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.-a). Millions of people worldwide are estimated to need AAC to support communicative exchanges (Beukelman & Light, 2020). People in need of AAC cross the lifespan with temporary or permanent disabilities due to, for example, development, illness, disease, syndromes, or accidents. Someone recovering from an illness, disease, or head and neck surgery may use AAC temporarily. Permanent use of AAC may be required for sustained, lifelong communication in people with autism spectrum disorder, a medical syndrome (e.g., Down, West, Williams), aphasia, developmental or acquired apraxia, or an acquired brain injury.

With your perspectives and background activated, continue your journey by defining AAC key concepts. Review Figure 1–1 *AAC Key Concepts* for a scope of ideas that will be discussed throughout this book: language and literacy (the ability to read and write), communication, AAC purposes of communication, communication context, technology, and intervention. While you explore each concept, consider each person and the cultures that inform their life experience, including communication. AAC is not an individual experience, but rather encompasses communication collectively occurring in cultural experiences with communication partners.

AAC Key Concepts

People communicate multimodally within a breadth of lived cultural experiences defined by beliefs; rituals; ways of interacting in society; and use of language(s), dialect(s), and pragmatic expectations. A person may orally speak using languages and their dialects, position their body and facial features, and use technology differently

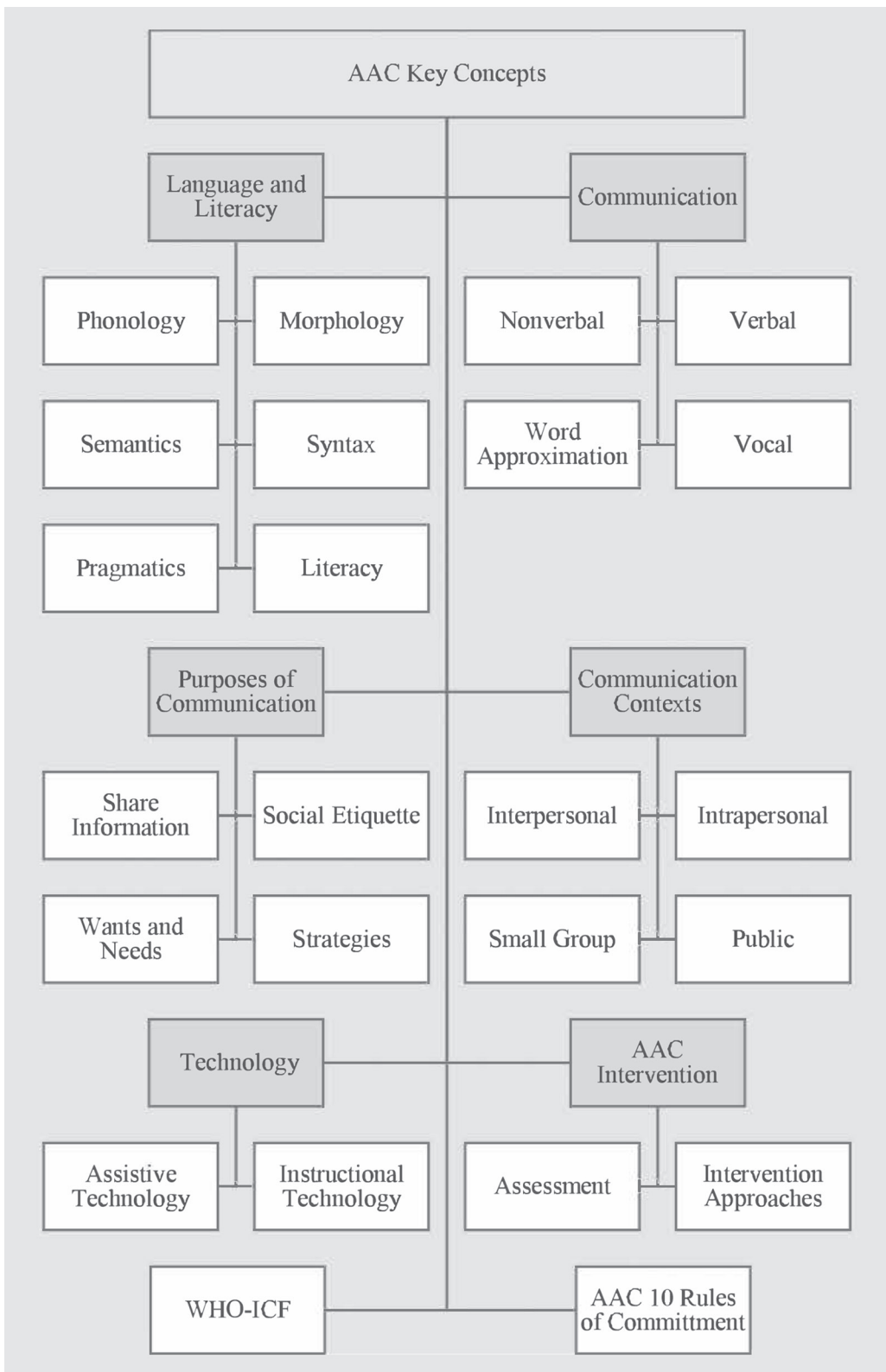


FIGURE 1-1. AAC key concepts.



Paper doll people with disabilities cut-outs. Source: Billion Photos/Shutterstock.com

to communicate with friends, people of authority, and less- and unfamiliar people. **Cultural responsivity** (a) requires understanding and responding to the combination of cultural variables and the full range and dimensions of diversity that an individual brings to interactions, (b) sees the client as the expert on their own life and calls upon the interventionist to support the client by offering meaningful and efficacious strategies in assessment and intervention (Hamilton et al., 2020), and (c) means valuing diversity, seeking to further cultural knowledge, and working toward the creation of community spaces and workspaces where diversity is valued (Hopf et al., 2021). Perceptions of behavior between people can be blurred with implicit and explicit bias, making bias important to identify and act upon (Mindel & John, 2022, pp. 8–13). AAC is a global experience; therefore, AAC assessment and intervention must reflect this experience with culturally responsive practices in language and literacy.

Language and Literacy

All people generally acquire language in the same way. However, there are different methods, with tools and interventions, that grant a person who uses AAC greater access to learning and expression of language and literacy skills (see more in Chapter 10 *Literacy and AAC*). **Language** is an expression of an agreed-upon set of rules for sounds and body movements that, alone or combined, carry meaning exchanged between people within cultures across the domains of semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics that



Boy with cards reading *I* and *Can*. Source: wavebreakmedia/Shutterstock.com

includes literacy, the ability to read and write in each language (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.-b; Owens, 2022). Literacy plays a vital role in AAC. Can you support language and literacy for a person using AAC? Yes, you can!

Communication

The interchange and transference of ideas through means, ways, and modalities is what defines **communication** (International Language Services, 2023). A person's language, including words, sounds, objects, images, and others in isolation or in combination, is a part of the communication transaction. For example, we may not verbally express our mood, but often people can infer how someone is feeling. Your body may express your state of being, but the language may have simply been a verbal *what's up?* In short, language is what is being exchanged; communication is how language is exchanged.

Communication and language, while considered different, are undeniably intertwined. People tend to communicate their message in the fastest and most effective way regardless of the modality, often without actively thinking about the cognitive-linguistic