Step One:
Choose the Target Words/Messages

In step one we will be determining which words and messages we need to specifically target for instruction. We often complete the step, not only for targeting specific words and messages, but also when we are first designing the AAC system that our student will be using.

going to consider which words and messages are important to the individual student, their family, friends, and teacher. We will be asking all of these partners for their input as we choose the most motivating significant words and messages to target. We will be observing the student interacting in their typical environment so we can determine what messages are necessary in order for the student to participate fully. Finally we will be considering developmental norms for vocabulary language and pragmatic development for those students who are learning language at the same time they are learning to communicate.

The first step in targeting the words and messages we will instruct involves asking the stakeholders, or the student family friends and teaching team, which words and messages are significant and motivating. We do this in two formats depending on the comfort level of the people we are surveying. We have a classroom Wordlist and a homework list document that we can send to the family, friends, and school team to complete. These documents ask for things like names of family and friends, pets, favorite foods, places that the student regularly goes
, And favorite activities and interests. There are checklists whenever possible to make this a quick and easy task for the relevant stakeholders to complete.

For our partners who are comfortable completing online surveys, we use a Google form document for the home words for communication and another for classroom words for communication. These links can be emailed directly to the stakeholders and completed online. The results of these surveys come directly to DTA school so that we can begin the process of customization. The team can also print out the results of the surveys to use as they are determining which words and messages they will be targeting with their student. If you would like to have your own forms that come to your Google Drive, just ask us we'd be happy to share a copy of this tool with you!

Anytime you see the DTA schools logo on a slide, you can click it to be linked directly to the location on our website that houses these tools.

The second strategy that we used to Target significant words and messages is observation. We observe the student in their typical activities as well as interview their partners to understand the activities and environments the student typically engages in during the day. We have two tools we use for this purpose, the classroom communication environment schedule analysis and the home and community communication environment schedule analysis forms.. The forms allow us to analyze the students schedule, consider the primary communicative objectives during those activities and the words and messages that are needed. There's even a column for you to note the location or method of communication the student uses during this time of day.

Classroom Communication Project (CCP) Schedule Analysis:
This form is for teachers to complete a detailed schedule of their AAC user(s) day. Information includes the activity, partners and the messages teachers feel their student(s) need(s). There is an additional worksheet for teachers to give us information regarding student and teacher names, favorite foods, places, activities etc.
You can use this form instead of the surveys we just discussed if you'd like.
 Home & Community Communication Schedule Analysis:

Just like the Classroom Schedule Analysis, this form helps you think about all of the opportunities students have to communicate at home and around town. You can start by writing down each activity during the day in the first column. Then go to the Messages column and think about what your student needs to be able to say during that activity, for example, during breakfast they may need to be able to say names of foods and make comments like "yummy!" or "gross!!" Once you've gone through the whole day, go back and think about where you will put those words and messages.

The third and final strategy we used to select appropriate words and messages for our students to learn is looking at research.

Now this is primarily important for our students who are learning both how to communicate and developing age-appropriate language skills at the same time. There are many ways that you can incorporate your knowledge of development language in selecting appropriate targets for your students but here are a few that we came up with.

In the AAC world you will hear many people talking about core word instruction. Core words are simply very high frequency words that can be very powerful when our AAC users are just beginning to communicate. They can be used across activities and environments in order to communicate functionally. There are approximately 200 to 400 of these words that you can target to make a quick impact on your students ability to communicate.
 On our website you can access a full training on how to implement the cord classroom at your school. We will also give you materials to target Corvo Cavaleri in our steps to learning program.

Another tool you can use to help determine appropriate word to messages is the

classroom communication and AAC goals grid. You will use this form to assess your students current skills communicating for five primary objectives, communicating wants and needs, communicating for social exchanges, communicating to share information, language development and communicating for the purpose of participating in the academic environment.

Finally you want to consider the developmental norms in the areas of language including vocabulary and pragmatics, or social messaging. The same developmental norms we consider for all of our speaking students are also relevant for a minimally verbal or nonverbal students.