



Definitions of Communication Competencies

Linguistic Competence

This focuses upon developing a knowledge of the key principles of language. Therefore it is important that the user has some understanding of structure, meaning and morphology within language. The most significant of these are identified within the linguistic competence. Please note, this is not an assessment of reading or writing but knowledge of the spoken word.

Noun	The part of speech that is used to name a person, place, or thing. When analysing vocabulary available on a device or communication book, we often find that there is a disproportionately high occurrence of nouns. Nouns are brilliant to respond to questions as single word answers but ask; does the user have more skills that this?
Verb	The part of speech that serves to indicate the occurrence or performance of an action. By combining a verb and noun the user has many more ways in which they can communicate, such as in the role of the director "Get ball"
Adjective	A word that modifies a noun by limiting, qualifying or specifying. It describes the attributes of a noun.
Preposition	A word put before a noun or pronoun to show how it is related to another word, also used to depict location of an object
Pronoun	The part of speech that substitutes for nouns or noun phrases and designates persons or things asked for
Time words	Those words that express a concept of time and specify when an event/activity will or has taken place, includes calendar words but also later, before, after, next etc.
Question words	Words used that expect a reply to a communication, ask a question, eg what, where, when, how, why.
Joining words	The part of speech that links two phrases together, such as, and, but, because
Sentence building	The combination of words to create a meaningful phrase or sentence.

Operational Competence

This is the development of the technical skills needed to operate the system, such as switching skills if this is needed. This adds to the cognitive load needed to communicate.

Access	How the user works the device/board. Direct using a finger, palm, pointer; indirect with a mouse; switch scanning; what skills does the user need to develop. If the user has switch access, can they scan? What speed is needed? How does the device scan through the buttons? Is this partner assisted?
Turning On	How the user turns on the device. Is the user able or given the opportunity to turn on their device independently? Is this directly or does the user need to use a switch as an on button? If the user has this skill, do they use it without prompting?
Shut down	How the user shuts down the device. Does the user have a specific button on the page for this?



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Page Layout	How much information is available on each page, what special functions are available, and how these are positioned. For instance, can the user cope with 12 buttons, 20 buttons? Is there a message window? Is there a page back button or just a home button to navigate? If appropriate, is this efficient to navigate through switching? Are there areas of the page that the user cannot access?
Message Window	Words and phrases can be sent to a sentence strip at the top of the page called the message window. This is mainly introduced when the user is beginning to combine symbols to build phrases. Questions to consider: Is the user aware that s/he is sending information to the window? Does s/he press the speak button/message window to repeat the message?
Clear Button	How the user clears a message from the message window. Does the user use this to clear phrases once they have been communicated? Does the user clear "mistakes" from the message window? Does the user clear the whole phrase, clear single words, a combination of both?
Navigation	How the user finds their vocabulary. For instance, some pages are set to always navigate back to the top page, other pages navigate through layers of vocabulary categories, and may go back to the previous page. How independently does the user navigate to vocabulary? Which pages are more frequently used? Is there a reason for this? Does the user need auditory prompts to find pages?
Page Back	A function that enables to user to go to the previous page, rather than to the top page.
Social Competence – Social Roles	
This focuses upon the different types of roles a communicator uses in everyday life	
Initiator	Starting a conversation or communication without prompting of any nature, or interrupting a communication with an unrelated message. This does not include beginning a conversation/communication with a routine activity.
Responder	Responds to the communication partner. This may include answering a question, replying to a social greeting, agreeing with a conversation.
Messenger	Carrying a message from one individual to another. The communicator may need prompting to do this. Messages may be whole phrases or built upon from individual words and phrases.
Narrator	Where the individual narrates a series of phrases/sentences to talk about an event, activity, experience. It may be in response to a question such as "Tell me about your day" but the individual is expected to tell a little story instead of replying with a single response. Generally narrators aim to build or combine their own selection of phrases using a consistent tense.
Director	Where the individual uses communication to instruct someone else to do something, such as "It's your turn!" or "Take me to the toilet please."



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Presenter/Trainer	Where the individual communicates to a wider audience or group. This may be during a school assembly/play or within a group to share "what I found out". The individual can use a presenter role in joint training of new staff.
Questioner	The individual asks a question to find out information from their communication partner.
Social Competence – Social Interaction/Communication Functions	
This focuses upon the purpose of the communication. These can overlap with social roles, eg relaying information in a message.	
To relay information	To give another person information. This could be in response to a question, as part of a message, or within a training session.
To make requests	To ask for something. A request may be initiated or could equally be in response to a question. The majority of PECS communication is based upon making a request.
Use social greetings	To greet a person, or people using social language, such as "hi" "bye" "how are you?" This is a good opportunity to combine a greeting with a person's name.
Answer questions	To reply to a question
Asking questions	To ask a question to find out information. This may be a pre-stored question or built from available words on device.
Give opinions/comments	To share an opinion, such as "I don't like that!" "Nasty!" or comment on/during an activity/game or within a conversation such as "That's cool!"
Make predictions	To guess and communicate an opinion about a future event. This may be predicting what might s/he might do on holiday, or guess the ending of a story.
To tell jokes/riddles	Self-explanatory. The individual should expect a response from the communication partner before delivering the punchline.
To gain attention	To draw attention to oneself. This may be using comments on a device, or alternative communication strategies. Ask whether the individual is able to gain attention successfully within different environments and with unfamiliar people
To protest/reject	To communicate successfully and have your protest/rejection of an activity acknowledged and upheld.
Engaging in short conversation	Self-explanatory. Consider what social roles are available within the conversation. Does the individual ask and answer questions, share news as a narrator?
Elaborating on a topic	Expanding upon a single communication, by sharing more information/news about the topic. The individual may need leading questions or prompting to do this.



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Ending a conversation	Does the individual remain silent when they have finished the conversation, use social niceties to end the conversation such as "I have to go now. Bye" or expect their communication partner to close the conversation.
Strategic Competence This focuses upon using existing skills to support communication and problem solve communication breakdowns. These skills do not focus exclusively upon using a communication device and/or book, but the range of total communication strategies.	
Use of gesture, sign, eye contact	How the user supports their communication using signs, facial expressions gestures, and speech. Maybe the individual signs for toilet, or gestures for yes and no. Does the individual recognise where these strategies work well and where s/he needs to use AAC as an alternative?
Use of spelling	How the user uses their literacy skills to spell words that are not available on their device. Does s/he attempt to spell the whole word, or initial letters?
Make up new words	How the user combines words to make up a new word combination for an unavailable word, such as dead + box to mean coffin, or the letter P + brother to mean Paul.
Silences	How the user indicates the time they need to prepare their communication, taking into account the needs of the communication partner. For instance does the user say "wait a minute" or "give me more time" if their communication partner jumps in too quickly.
Use explanation/circumlocution	How the user describes the characteristics of an unavailable word (circumlocution) or gives further information to support the communication partner's identification of an unknown/unavailable word.
Request clarification	Does the user have phrases available and use them when they have misunderstood or lost the thread of the conversation? Does the user acknowledge when this happens and ask for clarification or passively continue with the communication?
Repair a conversation	Does the user have phrases available to explain when their communication partner has misunderstood them? Does the individual persist with their communication exchange until the partner has correctly understood? Does the individual give up quickly?